NATION
Govt transfers Delhi judge to Allahabad
≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS
Markets fall as tariffs sink global equities
≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS
Pandya returns to lead MI, Siraj's form concerns Titans
≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 29 MARCH 2025 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 28 RAMADAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 86 | Pages: 8

SEHRI
5.08AM
IFTAR
6.33 PM

144 killed as 7.7 quake flattens Myanmar, Thailand

730 hurt, many feared dead as dam bursts, buildings fall

BANGKOK, 28 MARCH

A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand on Friday, destroying buildings, a bridge and a dam. At least 144 people were killed in Myanmar, where photos and video from two hard-hit cities showed extensive damage. At least 10 died in the Thai capital, where a high-rise under construction collapsed.

The full extent of death, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries. It is embroiled in a civil war, and information is tightly controlled.

"The death toll and injuries are expected to rise," the head of Myanmar's military government, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing said as he announced that 730 others were injured in his country.

In Thailand, Bangkok city authorities said 101 missing from three construction sites, including the high-rise.

The 7.7 magnitude quake struck at midday, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city. Aftershocks followed, one of them measuring a strong 6.4 magnitude.

Photos from Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, showed rescue crews pulling victims from the rubble of multiple buildings used to house civil servants.

Myanmar's government said blood was in high demand in the hardest-hit areas. In a country where prior governments sometimes have been slow to accept foreign aid, Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar was ready to accept assistance.

As images circulated of buckled and cracked roads, a collapsed bridge and a burst dam, there were concerns about how rescuers would even reach some areas in a country already enduring a humanitarian crisis. Bridge and monastery collapse and dam bursts in Myanmar In Mandalay, the earthquake reportedly brought down multiple buildings, including the Ma Soe Yane monastery, one of the largest in the city, and damaged the former royal palace.

Meanwhile, mild tremors were felt in Kolkata, Imphal and Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district.

However, according to official sources, there were no reports of damage to property or loss of life in the city due to the tremor.—*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

MYANMAR

Pagodas at a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, were severely damaged following the powerful earthquake ***PHOTO: PTI***

THAILAND

Rescuers work at the site of a high-rise building under construction that collapsed in Bangkok, Thailand ***PHOTO: PTI***

India stands ready to offer all possible assistance. In this regard, asked our authorities to be on standby. Also asked the MEA to remain in touch with the Governments of Myanmar and Thailand
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

RELIEF FOR CONG MP

Standup, art do not lead to hate: SC

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Supreme Court on Friday quashed an FIR filed against Congress MP **Imran Pratapgarhi**, who was accused of posting a provocative poem that allegedly promoted enmity between communities.

The court rejected the notion that art forms like poetry or stand-up comedy could incite hatred or animosity, noting that such a view would stifle legitimate expression. It also emphasized that courts must protect the fundamental rights of citizens, even if judges personally dislike certain expressions, as long as they do not infringe on reasonable public order restrictions under Article 19(2).

In a detailed 54-page verdict, the bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan stated that there was no prima facie case against the MP and dismissed the FIR as a "mechanical exercise" and a "clear abuse of the process of law."

The court reiterated that free expression of thoughts is vital for a healthy, civilized society and a dignified life, as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Constitutional courts, the bench said, must be at the forefront to "zealously protect" the fundamental rights of the citizens.

The top court also said the police machinery was a part of the state and its officers must abide by the constitution and respect its ideals. Pratapgarhi had uploaded a 46-second video on X, showing him walking while being showered with flower petals and a poem titled 'Ae khoon ke pyase baat suno' playing in the background.

Seventy-five years into our republic, we cannot be seen to be so shaky on our fundamentals that mere recital of a poem or for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as, stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities
—Supreme Court

The FIR, filed by Gujarat Police in January, accused him of promoting religious animosity and hurting religious sentiments.

Criticising law enforcement for their failure to understand the right to free speech, the Court said, "This case shows that even after 75 years of the existence of our Constitution, the law enforcement machinery of the State is either ignorant about this important fundamental right or does not care for this fundamental right." —*PTI*

BBMP to present Budget today, will it help B'luru?

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Bruhat Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bengaluru's civic body, will present its annual Budget for 2025-2026 on 29 March, with the total outlay expected to surpass Rs 18,000 crore, marking a 37.3 per cent increase from last year's Rs 13,116 crore. This marks the fifth consecutive year that the Budget will be presented without an elected council. Citizens and activists want the budget to address civic issues that haunt the City, be it pothole ridden roads, water crisis or lake management.
—*Salar News*

More on Page 2

Dallewal breaks indefinite fast, farmers released

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who was on an indefinite hunger strike in support of various demands, accepted water and broke his fast on Friday, the Punjab government told the Supreme Court.
Meanwhile, farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher, Abhimanyu Kohar and Kaka Singh Kotra, detained on 19 March's police crackdown following a meeting with a central delegation, were released on Friday.
The meeting was set up to discuss the farmers' demands, especially the MSP guarantee. As the departing farmers entered Mohali after the meeting, they were met with heavy barricading and some of their leaders were detained. Speaking to reporters in Patiala after his release on Friday, Pandher said t is now clear that the state government was hand-in-glove with Centre.—*PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

PM Modi to travel to Thailand, Lanka from 3-6 April

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake a two-nation tour of Thailand and Sri Lanka from 3-6 April, focusing on strengthening regional cooperation and bilateral ties. Modi's first stop will be Bangkok, where he will attend the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, marking his third visit to Thailand. The summit aims to boost cooperation among member nations, including India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan. Modi's participation will reaffirm India's commitment to its 'Neighbourhood First' policy and 'Act East' policy. In Thailand, Modi will meet the Thai Prime Minister to review bilateral cooperation. He will then travel to Sri Lanka for a three-day state visit, holding discussions with President Anura Kumara Disanayaka and inaugurating development projects implemented with financial assistance.—*PTI*

BIG DECISIONS

Govt hikes DA/DR by 2% for employees, pensioners

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Union Cabinet has given the green light to a 2 per cent increase in Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) for central government employees and pensioners, effective from 1 January, 2025. This move will benefit approximately 1.15 crore individuals, comprising 48.66 lakh employees and 66.55 lakh pensioners.

The DA/DR rate will now rise to 55 per cent of basic pay/pension, up from 53 per cent. —*PTI*

Cabinet approves Rs 23K cr PLI scheme for electronics

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

In a significant move, the Union Cabinet has approved two major initiatives aimed at enhancing manufacturing and agricultural support in India. The first is a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for passive electronic components, with an outlay of Rs 22,919 crore. tHE Cabinet also sanctioned a subsidy of Rs 37,216 crore for phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers for the Kharif season of 2025. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

CBI rules out gangrape in RG Kar case

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Friday informed the Calcutta High Court that its investigation and expert medical opinion had led to the conclusion that the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital was not a case of gangrape

High Court on Friday directed the CBI to submit the case diary initially prepared by the Kolkata Police. A single-judge bench of Justice Tirthankar Ghosh also instructed the CBI to present a list of individuals interviewed in the case at the next hearing scheduled for 23 April. The CBI submitted a sealed status report on its ongoing probe into the incident, where the doctor's body was discovered in the seminar room of the hospital on 9 August. —*PTI*

JUMAT-UL-VIDA WITH A CAUSE

A devotee ties a black armband to another devotee in protest against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill on Jumat-ul-Vida, the last Friday of Ramadan at Masjid-E-Khadria in Bengaluru's Benson Town ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD***

LAND VALUE SURGE

City's North-West Corridor to get 10% pricier

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

A recent study states that land value in Bengaluru's North-West Corridor—specifically along Tumkur Road—is expected to appreciate at an average rate of 10 per cent per annum.

The study also projects a commercial stock of 16 to 19 million square feet by 2030, with an incremental demand of 5 to 8 million square feet.

Additionally, the study suggests that by 2030, North-West Bengaluru will require an additional 10,000 residential units, reflecting a substantial increase in demand driven by real estate activities undertaken by prominent Grade A developers over the past five years.

Conducted by Brigade Group and Meraqi Advisory, the study was released on Friday.

According to the findings, the region is rapidly gaining recognition as one of Bengaluru's fastest-growing Secondary Business Districts (SBD), with significant real estate activities and infrastructural developments underway.

The study also highlighted that one of the key factors driving growth in the region is its cost-effective alternative to Hebbal and City Centre locations, leading to high demand for Grade A office spaces.

With a population of 11.6 lakh, the region's socio-economic profile is evolving, according to a press note issued by Brigade Group.

The appeal of the northwest corridor, particularly the Yeshwanthpur micro-market, is further strengthened by its proximity to the Peenya, Nelamangala, and Dabaspet industrial areas, the release stated.

In 2024, flex space absorption in Bengaluru's Grade A offices reached 12.5 million sq ft, marking a 45 per cent increase from the previous year. This demand has also extended to this micro-market, leading to a significant rise in demand for managed offices.. —*PTI*

Minister directs Kidwai to admit poor as in-patients

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Patients from economically disadvantaged backgrounds undergoing medical investigations at the Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology (KMIO) will now be admitted to hospital wards while awaiting their final test results, following a directive from Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Sharan Prakash Patil.

Sharan Prakash Patil ***PHOTO: FB***

During a recent visit to KMIO, Patil raised concerns over the hospital's bed occupancy, which remained below 70 per cent despite high patient volumes. Officials explained that beds were assigned only after a final diagnosis, leading to delays for many patients. In light of this, the minister ordered a policy change to allow interim admissions.

Patil highlighted the challenges faced by patients travelling from remote areas of Karnataka, particularly those from the north, stating that affording private accommodation in Bengaluru is often unfeasible. Although KMIO offers free accommodation and meals, he emphasised that ward admissions should take precedence. Additionally, he directed the transformation of Shantidhama and Aniketana wards into general wards, as over 90 per cent of KMIO's patients belong to the Below Poverty Line category. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Former DGP Garudachar dies at 96

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Retired IPS officer BN Garudachar died of age related ailments on Friday, at the age of 96. He has served the state as deputy commissioner of police and director general of police. Garudachar is remembered for his instrumental role in installing Bengaluru's first traffic signal at NR Junction in 1963 and for his role as city police commissioner in 1976, when he fought powerful underworld figures and brought significant change to the city's policing. He is survived by his two sons, including Chickpet BJP MLA Uday Garudachar, and two daughters. His cremation is scheduled for 29 March at 4 pm at Wilson Garden Cemetery.
—Salar News

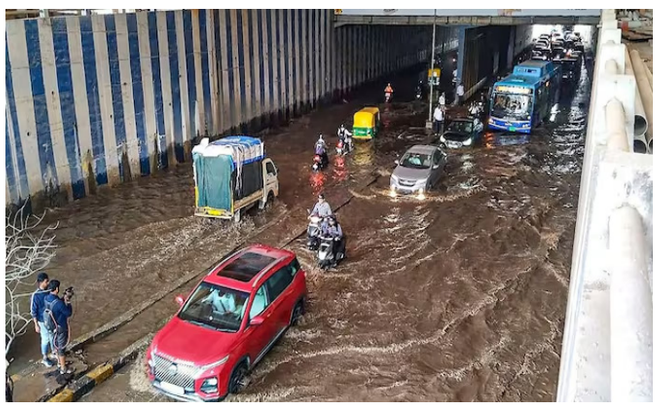
Will BBMP budget make B'luru better?

Bengalureans urge BBMP to improve the City roads instead of making new tunnel roads

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Bruhat Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bengaluru's civic body, will present its annual Budget for 2025-2026 on 29 March, with the total outlay expected to surpass Rs 18,000 crore, marking a 37.3 per cent increase from last year's Rs 13,116 crore.

This marks the fifth consecutive year that the Budget will be presented without an elected council, as Bengaluru has been under the governance of an administrator since September 2020, following delayed elections. A key highlight is the Rs 7,000 crore grant promised by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for the City's development. However, the question remains: who will ensure the transparent and efficient use of these funds?



Many demand for improved storm water drainage system ***PHOTO: ANI***

'A Budget without vision'

Several citizens and activists across Bengaluru have expressed their concerns, calling it a pointless exercise where the BBMP resembles a "headless chicken running amok."

Prakash Belawadi, an actor and civic activist, told Salar News: "The government isn't interested in managing Bengaluru and has never given real power to BBMP. The State always sits on top of it, with the Chief Minister as the final authority who approves projects. This budget won't be based on a scientific approach—it's just a performance with no meaningful outcome."

'The struggle for infra'

Recent rains have exposed the City's crumbling infrastructure, particularly in road maintenance and stormwater drainage. Water conservation expert Raj Bhagat highlighted the need to improve stormwater drainage systems, especially in flood-prone areas where natural water flow paths have been blocked. "The government must focus on enhancing and maintaining stormwater drains and constructing new ones, including roadside drains in valley areas between lakes," he said.

"Use every rupee judiciously—for better walkability, cycling infrastructure, streetlights, solid waste management, drainage systems, roads, and more. We do not want our money wasted on tunnel roads and skydecks," said the convener of Citizens for Citizens. Srinivas Alavilli, a civic activist, said he hopes to see significant investments in modern waste processing centres and improved transport of waste to landfills. Furthermore, he urged for a strengthened climate action cell. "For years, BBMP spent on infrastructure, yet has little to show in terms of improved quality of life. If they can just get one thing right, let it be well-designed footpaths everywhere. With the right budget—and commitment— it can be a game changer in making Bengaluru more liveable, Meera K, Co-founder of Citizen Matters and Oorvani Foundation, said. *—Salar News*

CIVIC ACTIVISTS DEMAND A LIVEABLE BENGALURU

The Citizens Agenda Group has outlined key areas that BBMP should focus on to ensure a livable Bengaluru:

1. **ROAD MAINTENANCE:** Establish a dedicated road repair team in each ward to fix potholes and remove encroachments, with real-time monitoring by ward committees to ensure quick action.
2. **DEMOLITION TEAM:** Set up a specialised team with the necessary resources to demolish illegal buildings and layouts, addressing the rising issue of illegal structures that hinder civic infrastructure.
3. **CIVIC POLICE FORCE:** Create a joint enforcement force to tackle civic violations, including illegal constructions, borewells, and encroachments, with the power to file complaints, issue fines, and prosecute offenders.
4. **C&D WASTE RECYCLING PLANT:** Establish a large-scale plant for recycling construction and demolition waste to prevent pollution and deal with debris from illegal demolitions.

Man held for theft at wedding event

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

A swift police operation led to the arrest of a man accused of breaking into a lodge room during a wedding event and stealing valuables worth Rs 3.15 lakh in Bagalur. Police Commissioner B Dayananda said the theft occurred on 16 March when the thief sneaked into a lodge room occupied by a relative of the complainant. He made away with a 35-gram gold chain, two mobile phones and a few other valuables. After receiving a complaint, Bagalur police tracked the suspect down to Hegganahalli Circle, where he was apprehended on 22 March. During interrogation, he confessed to the crime. Police searched his residence in Hegganahalli and recovered the stolen items, along with two two-wheelers linked to separate theft cases.
—Salar News

House owner's son held for stealing tenant's gold

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Hanumanthanagar police have arrested a man in Srinivasanagar for allegedly using a spare key to break into a tenant's house and steal gold jewellery worth Rs 4.90 lakh. According to the complaint, the theft was committed when the tenant's family was away. Upon returning, they found their gold ornaments missing but noticed that the door's lock was intact. Suspecting foul play, they lodged a complaint with the police. During the investigation, officers grew suspicious of the house owner's son. Upon questioning, he admitted to using a duplicate key to access the tenant's house and stealing the jewellery. A police team led by Inspector Suryaprasad later raided the accused's residence and recovered 70 grams of stolen gold jewellery, valued at Rs 4.90 lakh.
—Salar News

PHOTO: ANI

MCC hikes property tax by 3%

MYSURU, 28 MARCH

The Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) has hiked the property tax by minimum 3 to 5 percent, which will come into effect from April 1, 2025. The decision was made after obtaining the approval of the Administrator, said a notification issued by MCC commissioner. The changes made in property tax slabs will reflect in the property tax calculator. Meanwhile, the public can avail a 5 per cent rebate on the payment of property tax in April, according to a release.
—Salar News

BEML to make 42 new coaches for B'luru Metro

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

BEML Limited, a leading Rail and Defence company on Friday announced that it has been awarded an additional order of over Rs 405 crore by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited.

This order includes supplying seven additional metro trains for the Bangalore Metro Rail Project Phase 2, bringing the total number of train sets under the contract from 53 to 60, it said.

In a statement, the BEML Limited said, "Designed and developed entirely by BEML's in-house engineering teams in Bengaluru, these state-of-the-art driverless train sets feature a robust six-car formation. Constructed using high-tensile Austenitic stainless steel, the metro cars are engineered for enhanced durability, safety, and passenger comfort."

According to the company, each car is equipped with two roof-mounted Saloon Air Conditioners to ensure an optimal travel experience.

The new metro trains will incorporate advanced technological systems, including an IP-based Passenger Announcement and Passenger Information System and a Passenger Saloon Surveillance System, providing real-time station updates and ensuring enhanced security.

According to the company, each car is equipped with two roof-mounted Saloon Air Conditioners to ensure an optimal travel experience ***PHOTO: PTI***

Additionally, an LCD-based Dynamic Route Map display and electrically driven automatic doors synchronised with Platform Screen Doors will further enhance passenger convenience and safety, it said.

The initial contract, valued at approximately Rs 3,177 crore, covers the design, manufacturing, supply, installation, testing, and commissioning of train sets, along with comprehensive maintenance services for up to 15 years, it stated.

The company further said the project is a key component of Bangalore Metro Rail's expansion plans under phases 2, 2A, and 2B, reinforcing BEML's leadership in India's metro manufacturing sector. *—PTI*

Basavaraj Bommai ***PHOTO: PTI***

'MILK PRICE HIKED TO COVER UP BANKRUPTCY'

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Former chief minister and BJP MP Basavaraj Bommai on Friday criticised the Congress government for the milk price hike, claiming that it is a tactic to cover up the financial troubles caused by their guarantee schemes.

On Thursday, the government hiked the price of Nandini milk and curd by Rs 4 per litre, with effect from April 1. The government said that move was aimed at encouraging dairy farming in the state, considering the cost of milk production and processing. Opposition leader in the legislative council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said the government has increased the charges of everything from the fees for birth and death certificates to registration fees. Milk price is the latest, he said. *—Salar News*

CITY'S SUITCASE MURDER

Techie spent all night talking to wife's body

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

A day after the murder of 32-year-old Gauri Anil Sambekar in Doddakammanahalli came to light, the police are investigating the motive — a marital dispute is suspected – and the psychological state of the accused, her husband Rakesh.

Police said Rakesh, after killing Gauri, an IT professional, reportedly sat beside her body through the night, repeatedly asking her why she argued with him and insisted on returning to Maharashtra.

Bengaluru police have dispatched a team to Maharashtra, where Rakesh is currently undergoing treatment after allegedly attempting suicide.

Investigators found an untouched meal in the house, indicating that a heated argument had escalated before dinner.

After committing the crime, Rakesh dismembered and packed Gauri's body into a trolley suitcase and kept it in the bathroom. The next morning, he left for Pune in his car. Around 5pm, he called a downstairs tenant, initially claiming that his wife died by suicide and later admitting that he killed her. He then informed the house owner, who alerted the police. Police intercepted and detained Rakesh near Shirwal in Maharashtra, while he was on his way to Mumbai. He has been admitted to Pune's Sassoon Hospital as had allegedly consumed poison.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda said that they are waiting for medical clearance and a transit warrant to bring him back to the city. Meanwhile, Gauri's family has arrived in Bengaluru, and her post-mortem examination is underway. The police are investigating whether the murder was premeditated or the result of sudden provocation. *—Salar News*

20 cattle found tied cruelly in M'luru

MANGALURU, 28 MARCH

Authorities have intercepted a mini goods vehicle near a mosque in Mangaluru taluk, discovering nearly 20 cattle allegedly transported in a 'cruel manner' during a major operation against illegal cattle transport. The driver and two accomplices fled the scene, abandoning the vehicle.

Police noticed suspicious signs, including removed number plates, leading them to investigate further. Upon inspection, they found approximately 15-20 cattle cruelly tied within the vehicle, indicating they were being transported for slaughter. Tragically, two animals were discovered dead due to injuries sustained during transport, while the remaining cattle received necessary medical attention from veterinary officials.

Preliminary investigations revealed the vehicle's original registration number, linking two suspects—Tauseef Peradi and Harine Peradi—to the incident. A third individual remains unidentified, according to a senior police officer. A case has been registered at Bajpe police station under relevant laws concerning animal cruelty and illegal transport.

Sharan Pumpwell, the regional joint secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Mangaluru, highlighted a concerning rise in illegal cattle transportation across Dakshina Kannada district in recent weeks. He described the brutal method employed by smugglers, stating, "They had tied one hind leg of each animal to the roof of the pick-up truck." He called on authorities to take immediate action, warning that they would be held accountable for any adverse events resulting from inaction. Further investigations are underway to apprehend the absconding suspects and uncover the full extent of the operation. *—PTI*

CID intensifies honeytrap probe; MLC alleges murder attempt

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has ramped up its probe into the high-profile honeytrap case, seizing video clips allegedly used to blackmail Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna.

On Friday, Rajendra Rajanna, MLC and son of KN Rajanna, lodged a complaint with the Tumakuru District Police, claiming an attempt was made on his life. He has also submitted an audio recording as evidence.

As part of their investigation, CID officers visited minister Rajanna's residence in Bengaluru on Thursday and questioned his staff. They also seized a ledger book from his office to examine visitor records on the dates linked to the honeytrap allegations.

Rajendra Rajanna ***PHOTO: FB***

Sources said screen-recorded video clips were sent to Rajanna to blackmail him. Investigators have retrieved call detail records (CDRs) of numbers from which he was contacted around that time and are tracking suspicious callers.

- Sources said screen-recorded video clips were sent to Rajanna to blackmail him. Investigators have retrieved call detail records (CDRs).

It has also emerged that several Youth Congress members had frequent phone interactions with Rajanna during the period in question.

As a result, police may soon question party members in both Bengaluru and Tumakuru.

With Rajendra Rajanna's complaint now on record, police are likely to register a case in Tumakuru and initiate an investigation into the alleged murder attempt. *—Salar News*

IN BELAGAVI

2 kill self after losing Rs 50L in digital arrest

BELAGAVI, 28 MARCH

A loss of Rs 50 lakh in a digital scam pushed an elderly couple to debt and suicide in Khanapur taluk, police said. Diogjeron Santan Nazareth, 82, and his wife Flaviana, 79, residents of Beedi village in Khanapur, were found dead in their home after the neighbours alerted the Police who found a suicide note.

In the death note, Diogjeron said one Sumit Birra claiming to be a telecom official told him a sim card in his name was being used for illegal purposes and transferred the call to one Anil Yadav claiming to be from crime branch who threatened legal consequences if they did not transfer money. More than Rs 50 lakh was transferred. He expressed inability to pay off a gold loan he took and requested that the same be paid off with his wife's gold jewelry. He also expressed a wish for their bodies to be donated to a medical institution for students to study.

A man named Sumit Birra claiming to be a telecom official told the deceased a sim card in his named was being used illegally ***PHOTO: PTI***

Belagavi SP Dr Bheemashankar Guled told Salar News that the couple had obtained a gold loan of Rs 7.5 lakh from a private financial institution and borrowed Rs 5 lakh each from two persons.

"The couple were disturbed as they had not cleared the loan and interest amounts of private money lenders," Guled said. "Based on the death note and preliminary inquiry, we have registered a case of abetment to suicide and cyber fraud against the two accused named in the note. Further investigation is underway," said Belagavi Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled. "Now I am 82 years old, and my wife is 79. We have no one to support us. We do not want to live at the mercy of anyone, so we have taken this decision," the note said. Police have taken his mobile phone, the knife, and the suicide note into custody as part of the investigation. *—Salar News*

Nursing colleges to get foreign language labs

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The Karnataka government has announced plans to establish foreign language laboratories in all nursing colleges across the state, aiming to enhance the global employability of nursing students. Minister Sharan Prakash Patil made the announcement at the inauguration of a new physiotherapy building at Dr BR Ambedkar College of Physiotherapy, highlighting the increasing international demand for skilled nurses and allied health professionals.

Patil noted that hospitals in countries including Germany, Italy, Japan, and the UAE are actively seeking trained nurses and allied health sciences graduates. To facilitate this, the government will enable nursing students to learn German, Japanese, Italian, and English during their studies, equipping them for overseas career opportunities. In addition, the minister emphasised the importance of addressing the presence of substandard nursing and paramedical colleges. He called upon professional medical colleges to introduce allied health sciences courses, ensuring high-quality education with proper teaching and infrastructure. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi police file FIR against Kejriwal for misusing funds

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Delhi police has filed a First Information Report (FIR) against former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and others for allegedly misusing public funds by erecting large hoardings in 2019. The police presented this information in a compliance report submitted to Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Neha Mittal. The next hearing is scheduled for 18 April, as police requested additional time to investigate the matter. In addition to Kejriwal, the FIR includes former MLA Gulab Singh and former Dwarka councillor Nitika Sharma, who are accused of "deliberately misusing public funds" through the installation of oversized banners in various locations. —*PTI*

BJP MLA, 17 others acquitted in Nagra firing case

BALLIA, 28 MARCH

A special court in Ballia has acquitted 18 individuals, including former BJP MLA Ram Iqbal Singh, in the 2004 Nagra firing case due to a lack of evidence. Special Judge Gyan Prakash Tiwari of the MP/MLA Special Court issued the ruling on Thursday, as confirmed by defence lawyer Kaushal Singh. The case originated from an incident on 18 March, 2004, when Ram Iqbal Singh and his supporters allegedly surrounded the Nagra police station, leading to a violent clash between villagers and police. This confrontation resulted in the deaths of villagers Pradhan Rajbhar and Harendra Paswan, and injuries to around 30 villagers and 25-30 police personnel. Following an investigation, police filed charges against Singh and BSP MLA Umashankar Singh, although the state government later withdrew the charges against Umashankar.—*PTI*

Fourth policeman found dead in Kathua gunfight

JAMMU, 28 MARCH

The body of a fourth policeman was discovered using a drone on Friday near the site of a gunfight in a remote forested area of Kathua district, officials confirmed. The ongoing operation has already resulted in the deaths of three terrorists associated with the proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit. Intense gunfire and explosions persisted for a second day as police, supported by the Army and CRPF, resumed operations after a night halt. On Thursday, three policemen were found dead after a day-long gunfight, with another officer reported missing and several others injured. The People's Anti-Fascist Front, linked to (JeM), has claimed responsibility for the incident. —*PTI*

AIADMK members evicted from Tamil Nadu assembly

CHENNAI, 28 MARCH

AIADMK members were evicted en masse from the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Friday following a ruckus that erupted immediately after the Question Hour. Speaker M Appavu ordered their removal after the opposition members caused a disturbance. Leader of the Opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami attempted to raise a specific issue, but was told by Appavu that he could only do so with prior permission from the Chair. The opposition legislators protested the Speaker's decision, demanding that Palaniswami be allowed to speak. However, Appavu remained firm and called on Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin to start his reply to the House. As Udhayanidhi began to address the assembly, AIADMK members created further disruptions, prompting the Speaker to ask for them to be removed. —*PTI*

AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi wears a black band during a protest in Hyderabad; a man holds a banner while protesting with other Muslims in Varanasi, a BJP stronghold; people wear black bands outside a mosque in Patna. Muslims across the country answered All India Muslim Personal Law Board's call to wear black armbands in protest against the Waqf (Amendment Bill) ***PHOTO: ANI/PTI/ANI***

Muslims protest Waqf Bill with armbands

On the last Friday prayers this Ramadan, Muslims all over the country wore black in solidarity

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

After the All India Muslim Personal Law Board urged Muslims to wear a black armband to protest the Waqf (Amendment) Bill when they go for Juma prayers on last Friday of Ramadan, devotees across the country were seen donning the garment in solidarity. Support poured in from Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Patna, and Ranchi to name a few.

AIMPLB general secretary Maulana Mohammed Fazlur Rahim Mujaddidi issued a video appeal posted on the Board's X handle, saying "Protests by the AIMPLB against the Waqf(Amendment) Bill continue. In that context, register your protest on the occasion of Juma Tul Wida," he said.

People blocked the Razabazar four point crossing in a silent protest in Kolkata ***PHOTO: ANI***

In Patna, a large number of Muslims here wore black armbands during Jummah prayers. The armbands were distributed outside Jama Masjid (near Patna railway station) and Dariyapur mosque before the prayers.

In Hyderbad, AIMIM chief and Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi, who is also part of the JPC on the Waqf Bill, joined in the symbolic protest wearing a black armband as he offered prayers on Friday. Visuals from Hyderabad showed hundreds of people wearing black armbands along with Owaisi while offering prayers.

"We have tied this black ribbon on our arms against the Waqf Bill. Narendra Modi is shooting us in the chest with this Bill. He is shooting at our mosques and Imams," he said.

Meanwhile, in Kolkata, people blocked the Razabazar four point crossing in a silent protest.

Similarly, in Lucknow, AIMPLB member Khalid Rasheed Farangi Mahli, along with representatives of other Muslim organisations, wore black armbands.

"On the proposed Waqf Amendment Bill, AIMPLB and other Muslim orgs had put forward their opinion to the (Joint Parliamentary) committee that the amendment is not agreed by us. Waqf is a Muslim matter, and there should not be any changes to it so that Waqf properties cannot be in the danger zone," AIMPLB member Mahli told ANI.

"There are already big protests ongoing in Delhi, Patna, and on this day there is no appeal for a street protest, just a peaceful protest of wearing the band and reading the namaz, and peacefully go back to their home," he said.

Major rallies are scheduled to be held in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Malerkotla (Punjab) and Ranchi, the AIMPLB said in a statement. —*Agencies*

Friday prayers stopped in Srinagar's Jamia

Hurriyat Conference leader and Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said congregational prayers were not allowed at the historic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar on Friday. The grand mosque as also closed for prayers on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Qadr on Thursday night. Mirwaiz asked why the most important centre of Kashmir's religious identity was "repeatedly targeted," in a post on X.

Actor and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) Chief Vijay during the party's first general council meeting, in Chennai ***PHOTO: PTI***

CHENNAI, 28 MARCH

At the inaugural General Council meeting of his party, the Tamizhaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), actor Vijay declared that the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections would see a contest exclusively between his fledgling party and the ruling DMK.

During his address, he highlighted various shortcomings of the DMK government, particularly criticising its dynasty politics, as well as issues pertaining to women and child safety, and law and order. He called Chief Minister MK Stalin "the chief minister of monarchy."

Vijay called for the Centre to withdraw the controversial Waqf Bill, which he argued undermines the rights of Muslims, and demanded that the NDA government abandon its delimitation exercise.

He also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration of failing to allocate adequate funds to Tamil Nadu while imposing its three-language policy.

He assured attendees that, if elected, his government would ensure a "true rule of the people," focusing on equal access to education, healthcare, and strict law enforcement.

Vijay emphasised the need for a permanent solution to issues facing fishermen and reiterated his opposition to detrimental projects like the Parandur airport.

In resolutions passed at the meeting, Vijay was given full authority to make election-related decisions ahead of the polls, and his supporters proposed he be addressed as "Vetri Thalaivar" (Victorious Chief). —*PTI*

Can't change Pak's fanatic mindset: MEA

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, speaking in Lok Sabha on Friday, said India can't change fanatic mindset of Pakistan, highlighting attacks on minorities in the country and Bangladesh.

Replying to a supplementary query during the Question Hour, Jaishankar pointed to 10 incidents involving attacks on Hindus in Pakistan in February.

He added that New Delhi was "very closely" tracking the treatment of minorities.

"Like in Pakistan, we track the welfare and well-being of minorities in Bangladesh as well. In 2024, we had 2,400 incidents relating to attacks on minorities and in 2025, 72 incidents. This continues to be a matter of concern for our government," Jaishankar said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Responding to a query on whether India plans "tough action" on the lines of earlier prime minister Indira Gandhi's stance against Pakistan, Jaishankar said New Delhi is making its position "well known" but "we as a government and a country cannot change the fanatical and bigoted mindset of a neighbour."

"Even Indira Gandhi could not do it," he said. —*PTI*

BJP disrupts RS over remarks on Rajput king Rana

BJP MPs forced a 30-minute adjournment of proceedings in the Rajya Sabha as they demanded an apology from Samajwadi Party leader Ramji Lal Suman for his 'condemnable' remarks against Rajput king Rana Sanga. Calling Rana Sanga a symbol of chivalry and patriotism, Chairman Jadeep Dhankhar called Suman's remarks as "highly disparaging objectionable and painful."

LS passes Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill

The Lok Sabha passed the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2024, with Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal asserting that the it is part of the government's broader movement to eliminate colonial-era laws. The Bill, which replaces the Indian Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925, aligns India's maritime law with international conventions .

Ports Bill introduced in Lok Sabha

The Indian Ports Bill 2025 which seeks to classify certain ports as "mega ports", establishment of a Maritime State Development Council and effectively adopting international obligations was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday. The council will make various recommendations, including an efficient and conducive framework for ports in India.

Centre's fiscal deficit touches 85.8 pc

The Centre's fiscal deficit touched 85.8 per cent of the annual target by the end of February 2025, according to the data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) on Friday. In actual terms, the fiscal deficit -- the gap between expenditure and revenue -- was Rs 13,46,852 crore during April-February 2024-25. The total expenditure was Rs 38.93 lakh crore, or 82.5 per cent of the RE, according to the revenue-expenditure data of the government. In

the year-ago period, it stood at 83.4 per cent. In the Union Budget presented in Parliament, the fiscal deficit for 2024-25 has been pegged at 4.8 per cent of GDP (lower than the earlier estimate of 4.9 per cent).

'DEFAMED INDIA'

Mamata heckled at Oxford

KOLKATA, 28 MARCH

Political reactions intensified following protests that disrupted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's speech on social development and women's empowerment at Kellogg College, Oxford. Allegedly organised by Left-leaning youth, the protests prompted sharp responses from various political parties.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) condemned the disruption as a disgrace to the nation, with spokesperson Kunal Ghosh asserting that the protesters, not being Oxford students, insulted India instead. TMC's IT cell chief Debangshu Bhattacharya threatened that the perpetrators would face repercussions in due course.

In contrast, the student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—SFI—argued that Banerjee must answer pressing issues, including rising student dropout rates and the RG Kar medical student's rape and murder case.

During her speech, Banerjee faced pointed questions but remained composed, even whimsically offering the protesters "chocolates." While she insisted that such disruptions only strengthened her resolve, critics, including BJP leaders, accused her of damaging India's reputation abroad.

BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia labelled her part of a "defame India group" alongside Rahul Gandhi, suggesting her remarks undermined foreign investor confidence. The spat reflects ongoing tensions in Indian politics as leaders navigate domestic discontent within the global arena. —*PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee delivers a keynote address on 'Social Development-Girl, Child and Women Empowerment in West Bengal' at Kellogg College, during a visit to the University of Oxford ***PHOTO: PTI***

Madras HC grants interim anticipatory bail to Kunal Kamra

CHENNAI, 28 MARCH

- Kamra in his plea, said he fears physical harm and threats to his life if he is arrested in Maharashtra. The court agreed and granted him bail until 7 April

The Madras High Court on Friday granted interim anticipatory bail to comedian Kunal Kamra after his jokes on Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde triggered a massive political row.

"This court is inclined to grant anticipatory bail till 7 April," the court said.

Although the FIR has been registered in Khar, Mumbai, Maharashtra, he is seeking anticipatory bail from Madras HC as he resides within its jurisdiction. He "fears actual physical bodily harm and threats to his life and personal liberty in the event of his arrest" if he were to enter Mumbai.

Citing a Supreme Court judgment, the judge said he was prima facie satisfied as to why Kamra was unable to approach a Maharashtra court.

In his petition, Kamra submitted he has been working on and touring with his latest tour titled "Naya Bharat," over the past year.

The theme and content include a humorous yet critical take on Ambani's Wedding, Diwali's impact--how the festival affects people, animals, and birds and Parody songs – "A musical finale that adds an extra layer of humour to the show".

"It is pertinent to mention here that the disputed songs/poem does not name the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra," he claimed.

The controversy stems from Kamra's show at the Habitat Comedy Club in Mumbai's Khar, where he performed a parody song about Shinde. The act prompted a strong backlash from Shiv Sena supporters, who vandalised the club and the hotel. Kamra was then booked by the Khar police for allegedly making defamatory remarks.

Kunal Kamra ***PHOTO: ANI***

Meanwhile, comedian Samay Raina on Friday appeared before the Maharashtra Cyber for the second time this week in connection with an obscenity case filed over controversial remarks made by social media influencer Ranveer Allahbadia on a YouTube reality show hosted by the former. —*PTI*

Varanasi bans fish and meat sales during Navratri

VARANASI, 28 MARCH

In a significant move, all fish and meat shops within the municipal limits of Varanasi will be closed during the upcoming Navratri festival, marking a first for the city. This decision was unanimously approved at an executive meeting of the Varanasi Municipal Corporation on Thursday. Mayor Ashok Tiwari announced the ruling on Friday, stating, "Considering the religious significance of Kashi and the sentiments of the devotees, it has been decided to close all fish and meat shops during Navratri." Shopkeepers who fail to comply with this order will face strict penalties. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Second body found in collapsed T'gana building

HYDERABAD, 28 MARCH

The body of a second worker, trapped under debris from a collapsed under-construction building in Bhadradri Kothagudem district, was recovered in the early hours of Friday, police confirmed. The incident occurred on Wednesday afternoon when a six-storey structure in Bhadrachalam town collapsed, leaving two labourers trapped. Rescue operations launched by teams from the NDRF, Singareni Collieries, fire services, and police were met with challenges. A 45-year-old worker previously rescued succumbed to injuries while receiving treatment on Thursday. A police official reported that the second worker's body was found at around 2 AM on Friday. In the aftermath, a case has been filed against the building owner for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, with ongoing investigations regarding alleged construction rule violations. *—PTI*

45kg Naxal-laid IED defused in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 28 MARCH

Security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district successfully recovered and defused a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) planted by Naxalites on Friday. The 45-kilogram device, capable of obliterating a mini truck and creating a 15-foot-deep crater, was discovered beneath the Cherpal-Palnar road by a team from the 222nd battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) during an area dominance operation in the Gangaloor sector. The IED featured a command switch mechanism, commonly used by Naxalites to target security vehicles. A significant tragedy was avoided through the timely recovery and neutralisation by the Bomb Disposal Squad. Such IEDs have previously claimed civilian lives, and a recent attack in January resulted in the deaths of eight police personnel and their driver. *—PTI*

Chardham Yatra: Health advisory issued for pilgrims

DEHRADUN, 28 MARCH

The Uttarakhand government issued a health advisory for Chardham Yatra pilgrims, urging them to undergo a medical check-up before embarking on their journey. The advisory, available in 12 languages, emphasizes the importance of preparing physically and mentally for the high-altitude trip. Every year, hundreds of pilgrims die due to health-related issues, primarily caused by high-altitude sickness, oxygen deficiency and cardiac arrest. Last year, 246 pilgrims died. Pilgrims are required to register on the Health and Tourism Registration App and undergo health screening at designated points. The advisory recommends consuming adequate water and monitoring health regularly during the pilgrimage. *—PTI*

SC calls Dallewal a 'genuine leader'

Asks panel to address farmers' grievances

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court on Friday said septuagenarian Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who ended his indefinite hunger strike as part of the farmers' protests after about four months, was a "genuine leader without a political agenda".

"We know some people did not want settlement of grievances of farmers," the court said. "Pray for his good health. We have been in open court without mincing words saying that he is a genuine farmer leader and he has no political agenda. Dallewal is one person who raises genuine demands (of farmers). There are people who would never like any settlement to take place."

Dallewal is a senior leader of the joint forum of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and had been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since 26 November, last year to press the Centre to accept the demands.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh was informed by Punjab advocate general (AG) Gurminder Singh that protesting farmers at Khanauri and Shambhu borders had dispersed and all the blocked roads and highways were cleared.

The bench asked Punjab and Haryana government to file a status report on the prevailing situation on the ground and instructed the committee headed by a former high court judge to look into the grievances of farmers and file its next supplementary status report.

It also dropped the contempt proceedings initiated against the Punjab Chief Secretary and Director General of Police for not complying with the apex court's order on providing medical aid to Dallewal.

In a related development, farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher, Abhimanyu Kohar and Kaka Singh Kotra, detained in a recent police crackdown following a meeting with a central delegation, were released on Friday. *—PTI*

Govt transfers Delhi judge to Allahabad

Rejects PIL seeking FIR against judge

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The government on Friday notified the transfer of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma to his parent Allahabad High Court, the order coming amid a row over alleged discovery of a huge amount of cash from his official residence here.

The Supreme Court said the Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court was asked not to assign any judicial work for now to Justice Varma upon assuming charge there.

"The Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court for the time being has been asked not to assign any judicial work to Justice Yashwant Varma, when he assumes charge as a judge of the Allahabad High Court," an apex court press release said.

The Supreme Court Collegium reasserted that the move was separate from an in-house probe ordered by the top court over the alleged discovery of cash from Justice Varma's residence after a fire incident on 14 March.

Yashwant Varma PHOTO: PTI

Calling it "premature", the Supreme Court on Friday rejected a PIL seeking Delhi Police to register an FIR over incident.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said an in-house inquiry was in progress and there would be several options open to the chief justice of India after the probe's conclusion.

The bench, therefore, refused to examine the plea of advocate Mathews J Nedumpara and three others.

"After the in-house inquiry is over, all options are open. If the report indicates something is wrong, the Chief Justice can direct the registration of an FIR or refer the matter to the Parliament," the court said. "The petition is premature because internal inquiry is going on."

Nedumpara, however, had argued the investigation was not the court's responsibility and should carried out by the police.

"The in-house committee is not a statutory authority and cannot be a substitute for criminal investigations," he said. *—PTI*

Bangladeshi held in Mumbai; cops look for Nagpur riot links

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

A 29-year-old Bangladeshi national, Azizul Nizanul Rahman, has been arrested in Mumbai for allegedly staying illegally in India. Authorities are now investigating his potential involvement in the violent unrest that occurred in Nagpur on 17 March.

Rahman was taken into custody by the Crime Branch Unit II in Dadar on Wednesday. The police believe he was present in Nagpur during the violence and had recently moved to Dadar. Rahman, a daily wage labourer, reportedly admitted to acquiring an Aadhaar card using forged documents.

Officials are currently analysing Rahman's mobile phone tower location as part of their investigation. They have also informed their counterparts in Nagpur about the arrest.

The unrest in Nagpur erupted amid claims that a 'chadar' bearing holy inscriptions was burnt during protests led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, advocating for the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district. Over 110 individuals have been arrested in relation to the violence, including key suspect Fahim Khan.

Authorities continue to investigate the broader implications of this unrest and any further connections Rahman may have. *—PTI*

6 Bangladeshi migrants held in Delhi

Police in Delhi's Jahangirpuri arrested six suspected illegal Bangladeshi migrants on Thursday, who allegedly disguised themselves as transgender women to evade detection. According to police, they underwent minor surgeries and hormonal treatments to change their appearance and assimilate into the local transgender community. The arrest was part of a ten-day surveillance operation. *—PTI*

CONSERVATION BID

After the Central Bureau of Investigation apprehended two individuals in possession of 65 Indian Roofed Turtles and Spotted Pond Turtles, the Tiruchendur Forest Department in the Thoothukudi district has successfully recovered around 2,000 turtle eggs from the beach, marking a positive step in the conservation of sea turtles in the region PHOTO: ANI

NHRC demands report on KIIT student suicide

BHUBANESWAR, 28 MARCH

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has flagged gross negligence in the suicide of a 20-year-old B Tech student from Nepal at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) and has requested action reports from the Odisha government, UGC, and NAAC within four weeks.

Following a probe into Computer Science student Prakriti Lamsal's death in February, the NHRC found that prior to her suicide, she had complained to KIIT authorities about alleged blackmail by a male student. The NHRC reported significant negligence from university officials, potentially amounting to abetment of suicide.

The commission noted that nearly 1,100 students vacated hostels in haste following her death. They described the institution's response to the allegations as "sheer insensitivity."

The Odisha Police have arrested the male student in question and ten university employees for assaulting Nepalese students amid campus unrest. The incident has drawn nationwide outrage, prompting intervention from the Nepalese Prime Minister and discussions in the Odisha Assembly. *—PTI*

Restaurants can't impose service charges: Delhi

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Friday held the payment of service charge on food bills was voluntary and restaurants couldn't impose it on customers.

Justice Prathiba M Singh dismissed two petitions of the restaurant bodies challenging the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) guidelines prohibiting hotels and restaurants from levying service charge on food bills.

The mandatory collection of service charge on food bills was violative of consumers rights and contrary to law and consumers were not barred from tipping voluntarily if they wished to do so, the court held.

The court added the mandatory collection of service charge on food bills was "misleading" and "deceptive" as it gave an impression to the consumers that they were imposed in the form of service tax or GST. Such a practice amounts to "unfair trade practice" and

the amount cannot be mandatorily added in the bill, it said.

Federation of Hotels and Restaurant Associations of India and National Restaurant Association of India had moved the court in 2022 by filing two separate petitions. The court upheld the guidelines and imposed Rs 1 lakh cost each on the petitioners to be deposited with the CCPA towards consumer welfare. *—PTI*

Signs with Mughal names vandalised

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

A Buddhist outfit, Bharatiya Baudh Sangh, has been accused of vandalising road signboards in Lutyens' Delhi, bearing the names of Mughal and Delhi Sultanate rulers. The incident occurred on Friday, with members of the group allegedly covering the signboards with black spray paint and pasting new names over them.

The targeted signboards included those for Shahjahan Road, Tughlaq Lane, Akbar Road, and Humayun Road. The vandals replaced these names with Veer Savarkar Marg, Ahilya Bai Marg, Maharishi Valmiki Marg, and Balasaheb Thackeray Marg, respectively.

Sanghpriya Rahul, President of Bharatiya Baudh Sangh,

People protest, demanding that the Akbar Road in New Delhi be renamed after Maharishi Valmiki PHOTO: PTI

defended the actions, stating that the group urges the Prime Minister and Home Minister to remove Mughal names from public spaces. He said these names symbolise a history of atrocities, and the group does not want them to remain.

This incident is not an isolated one, as there have been similar acts of vandalism in the past. *—PTI*

CAG flags healthcare flaws in Guj

GANDHINAGAR, 28 MARCH

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has pointed out several deficiencies in Gujarat's healthcare sector, including the shortage of doctors, nurses, beds and the lack of a comprehensive health policy.

The 'Report of the CAG of India on Public Health Infrastructure of Health Services', which was tabled on the Assembly floor on Friday, said a shortage of more than 25 per cent doctors and paramedics was noticed in 22 and 19 districts, respectively, said the report. The state has 33 districts.

"Despite recruitment of 9,983 healthcare personnel between 2016 and 2022, there was a shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedics to the extent of 23, 6 and 23 per cent, respectively, in Public Health Institutions as of March 2022," the CAG said in its report.

The CAG found a shortage of more than 25 per cent doctors and paramedics in 22 and 19 districts, respectively PHOTO: X

The overall vacancy in doctors, nurses, and paramedics cadres stood at 13 per cent in public health facilities as of March 2022. Vacancies of specialist doctors stood at 51 per cent and 49 per cent in sub-district hospitals (SDHs) and community health centres (CHCs), respectively, it said. *—PTI*

DESIGN VULNERABILITY

Alert: Not all AI apps are safe; tech prone to attacks

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Not all Artificial Intelligence (AI) apps are safe and users signing up for them should consider using an anonymous account not linked to their personal or professional identity, India's federal cyber security agency has advised.

In its advisory, the Computer Emergency Response Team of India (CERT-In), the national technology arm to guard the Indian Internet space and combat cyber attacks, has underlined "vulnerabilities" in AI design, training and interaction mechanism.

The "vulnerabilities" the latest advisory talks about include technical issues such as data poisoning, adversarial attacks, model inversion, prompt injection and hallucination exploitation. "As AI becomes advanced and more ubiquitous, the associated risks also increase. Numerous attacks target AI applications, by taking advantage of flaws in data processing and machine learning models," said the advisory, accessed.

Threat actors can exploit the rising demand for AI apps to create fake apps designed to trick users into downloading them, it noted.

The agency advised AI users to avoid sharing personal and sensitive information as the data is collected and used by the service provider to improve their models. "It is advised to avoid utilising generative AI tools available online for professional work involving sensitive information," it said.

A 'prompt injection' is a manipulation attack that enables malicious actors to 'hijack' the AI model's output and 'jailbreak' its system to bypass its safeguards. As part of 'backdoor attack' malicious actors implant hidden triggers within an AI model during its training process.

These attacks pose significant threats to AI applications' security, reliability, and trustworthiness, it said.

AI should not be trusted when it comes to accuracy as "bad data", the advisory said. Malicious hackers could "fool" AI tools to churn out inaccurate content, known as 'hallucinations" in tech terms. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

PORSCHE CRASH: TWO PUNE COPS FACE DISMISSAL

PUNE, 28 MARCH

Two Maharashtra Police officers are likely to face dismissal for alleged negligence in the investigation of last year's fatal Porsche crash, where a drunk minor driver killed two tech professionals, a top official said.

Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said a proposal was sent to the home department on Thursday, "seeking dismissal of these two suspended cops." Inspector Rahul Jagdale and assistant police inspector Vishwanath Todkari, attached to Yerawada police station, were suspended for late reporting of the incident and dereliction of duty at the time. *—PTI*

RUN PIKACHU RUN

Amidst widespread protests in Turkey following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a person dressed in a Pikachu costume joins the crowd, only to flee when police deploy water cannons

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Political storm brews over Mohanlal's 'L2: Empuraan'

The much-hyped Mohanlal-starrer, 'L2: Empuraan', directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, received an overwhelming response in theatres on its opening day on Thursday, followed by raging controversies on its political content.

The film, the second part of the 'Lucifer' movie, a trilogy planned by the Prithviraj-Mohanlal team, has become a topic of hot debate over its critique of Right-Wing politics and the covert mention of the Gujarat riots.

On the opening day itself, the Sangh Parivar came out with vehement criticism against the film on social media, while the Congress and a section of the Left platforms celebrated the film for portraying the right-wing politics as "villainous".

However, scriptwriter Murali Gopy, who Sukumaran endorses as his 'co-creator,' dismisses the controversy, saying everyone has the right to interpret the film in their way.

"I will keep total silence on the controversy. Let them fight it out. Everyone has the right to interpret the film in their way," Gopy told PTI. Gopy said the film has mention of the social and political atmosphere in the country and some people have expressed their views against it and others have accepted it. "Let them interpret it. I will keep mum," he said.

"The Left is non-existent now. They are there on the extreme right," he claimed.

Gopy had earlier received a bashing for his script for the 2013 film, 'Left Right Left', directed by Arun Kumar Aravind, which was a stinging criticism of the leading Left party in Kerala.

Some Right-Wing media handles, including Sanatana Dharma, have dubbed the film as "anti-Hindu", saying Prithviraj had deceived Mohanlal and his fans by making such a movie. Another right-wing platform, Hindu Post, claimed, "Empuraan has revealed itself to be an overt Hindu-bashing propaganda film, portraying Hindus as villains amid the ongoing genocide of Hindus across the subcontinent, including India."

'L2: Empuraan', directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, received an overwhelming response in theatres on its opening day on Thursday

PHOTO: PTI

- Gopy said the film has mention of the social and political atmosphere in the country and some people have expressed their views against it and others have accepted it.

However, the BJP state unit chose to distance itself from the controversy, saying the audience can express their views after watching the film. BJP state general secretary P Sudheer, said the party is not taking up any campaign against the movie.

"The film will go its way, and party will do its work. The party will not be affected by any film. The Sangh Parivar activists have the right to express their views and let the audience decide whether it is good or bad," he told reporters here.

Kerala State Youth Congress president and Palakkad MLA Rahul Mamkoottathil, who praised 'Empuraan' as a pan-Indian film that speaks Malayalam, said the hate campaign against Mohanlal, Prithviraj Sukumaran and Murali Gopy over its political content cannot be accepted in any way.

"The same people who advocated freedom of expression for films based on unfounded lies and religious hatred like 'Kashmir Files' and 'Kerala Story,' have now come out against 'Empuraan'," he said in a Facebook post on Friday.

Congress vice president and former MLA V T Balram said he was amused by the reception the Malayalam movie with a strong political content had in the theatres.

Bineesh Kodiyeri, actor and son of late CPI(M) state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, in a post, praised the makers of 'L2: Empuraan', saying they "deserved bravery awards for attempting to reveal the present-day reality." However, some Left-leaning media handles chose not to participate in the debate for "the total negligence in the film about the presence of the Left."

'L2: Empuraan', which had its worldwide release on Thursday, had 4,500 shows in 746 screens in Kerala alone on the opening day, sources said. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈھ

India is addicted to online betting & fantasy gaming

A surge in the popularity of betting apps and fantasy gaming in India has led to concerns about addiction and financial exploitation.

Pradeep Kumar, 24, a postgraduate from Kanpur has been struggling with gambling addiction for two years. It has led to him frequently taking loans from multiple sources to feed his habit.

"On one occasion, he lost over 125,000 Indian rupees in a cricketing app that nearly destroyed him. We take him for counseling, but he keeps falling back into his addictive behavior. These apps promise easy money," Ranjani, his mother, told DW.

Kumar's story is not uncommon in India. There are many stories of individuals, especially young people, losing significant sums which put severe financial strain on families. In the southern state of Telangana, betting apps have also gained rapid traction. A family of three in Nizamabad took their lives last year after being unable to repay a loan of 3 million rupees racked up by their son through online gambling.

India has more than 140 million users regularly taking part in online gambling and betting. These numbers surge to 370 million users during major events, like the Indian Premier League (IPL), cricket tournament.Alongside the boom in online betting apps, fantasy gaming has emerged as a significant segment of the online gaming industry.

Fantasy apps like Dream11, My11Circle, and MPL tap into this enthusiasm by letting users create virtual teams of real players and earn points based on their actual performances.

The segment as a whole has more than 180 million users and more than 300 platforms, according to think tank Think Change Forum's 2023 report. It points out that factors such as digital infrastructure growth and smartphone usage have fueled the market. The promotion of betting apps by celebrities and social media influencers is another significant factor in their popularity.

"Apps such as these can take over one's identity as one may be preoccupied with betting all the time. It will affect one's financial situation and impact relationships too. If someone is using betting apps repetitively and this pervades their day-to-day functioning, it is time to seek help," Achal Bhagat, a psychiatrist from New Delhi, told DW.

Anjali Nagpal, a neuropsychiatrist who has studied the issue closely, said 'gambling disorder' is silently becoming an epidemic in India and is being normalized. "When favorite celebrities openly promote them across social media, youngsters start to feel less like it's a risky activity and more like a trendy thing to do. It creates a false sense of security and on seeing their heroes endorsing it, their thought is: 'How bad can it be?'" Nagpal told DW.

In her reckoning, the cycle starts small after a few wins that trigger a dopamine rush, making players feel accomplished. "The consequences include heavy financial losses, debt, family pressure, and constant disappointment which take a severe toll on mental health. " added Nagpal.

The Indian government has taken steps to curb illegal betting apps. With the lucrative IPL cricket tournament currently underway, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence has intensified its scrutiny of offshore online gaming entities that offer betting. It is also focusing efforts on companies involved in money laundering, operating without licenses, or posing security risks.

About 700 offshore entities involved in online betting or gambling are on the department's radar. But it is finding it difficult to rein them in. The illegal sports betting market receives an estimated inflow of USD 100 billion annually from India, according to Think Change Forum. In some cases, it was found that some betting apps disguise themselves as fantasy platforms to evade legislation.

"Esports and real money gaming often get lumped together, but they are worlds apart. Esports is about skill, strategy, and competition — where players put in hours of practice and the outcome depends entirely on their performance.

At its core, it is about entertainment, community, and mastery," Rushindra Sinha, co-founder of Global Esports, told DW.

Sinha said he was concerned about how some of these platforms are using the popularity and credibility of video games to market themselves.

"If they were more accurately labelled, I think the kind of oversight and regulation they would face would be very different," said Sinha, pointing out that a lot of game studios build casino-like features into their games to target young children, which is equally harmful. *—PTI*

India has more than 140 million users regularly taking part in online gambling and betting

PHOTO: AI

ChatGPT's viral Studio Ghibli-style images raise AI copyright concerns

Fans of Studio Ghibli, the famed Japanese animation studio behind "Spirited Away" and other beloved movies, were delighted this week when a new version of ChatGPT let them transform popular internet memes or personal photos into the distinct style of Ghibli founder Hayao Miyazaki.

But the trend also highlighted ethical concerns about artificial intelligence tools trained on copyrighted creative works and what that means for the future livelihoods of human artists.

Miyazaki, 84, known for his hand-drawn approach and whimsical storytelling, has expressed skepticism about AI's role in animation.

Janu Lingeswaran wasn't thinking much about that when he uploaded a photo of his 3-year-old ragdoll cat, Mali, into ChatGPT's new image generator tool on Wednesday. He then asked ChatGPT to convert it to the Ghibli style, instantly making an anime image that looked like Mali but also one of the painstakingly drawn feline characters that populate Miyazaki movies such as "My Neighbor Totoro" or "Kiki's Delivery Service". "I really fell in love with the result," said Lingeswaran, an entrepreneur who lives near Aachen, Germany. "We're thinking of printing it out and hanging it on the wall."

Similar results gave the Ghibli style to iconic images, such as the casual look of Turkish pistol shooter Yusuf Dikec in a T-shirt and one hand in his pocket on his way to winning a silver medal at the 2024 Olympics. Or the famed "Disaster Girl" meme of a 4-year-old turning to the camera with a slight smile as a house fire rages in the background.

ChatGPT maker OpenAI, which is fighting copyright lawsuits over its flagship chatbot, has largely encouraged the "Ghiblification" experiments and its CEO Sam Altman changed his profile on social media platform X into a Ghibli-style portrait. In a technical paper posted on Tuesday, the company had said the new tool would be taking a "conservative approach" in the way it mimics the aesthetics of individual artists.

"We added a refusal which triggers when a user attempts to generate an image in the style of a living artist," it said. But the company added in a statement that it "permits broader studio styles — which people have used to generate and share some truly delightful and inspired original fan creations." Studio Ghibli hasn't yet commented on the trend. The Japanese studio and its North American distributor didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

ChatGPT maker OpenAI, has largely encouraged the 'Ghiblification' experiments

PHOTO: CHATGPT

As users posted their Ghibli-style images on social media, Miyazaki's previous comments on AI animation also began to resurface.When Miyazaki was shown an AI demo in 2016, he said he was "utterly disgusted" by the display, according to documentary footage of the interaction.

The person demonstrating the animation, which showed a writhing body dragging itself by its head, explained that AI could "present us grotesque movements that we humans can't imagine". It could be used for zombie movements, the person said. That prompted Miyazaki to tell a story.

"Every morning, not in recent days, I see my friend who has a disability," Miyazaki said. "It's so hard for him just to do a high five; his arm with stiff muscle can't reach out to my hand. Now, thinking of him, I can't watch this stuff and find it interesting. Whoever creates this stuff has no idea what pain is." He said he would "never wish to incorporate this technology into my work at all." "I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself," he added.

Josh Weigensberg, a partner at the law firm Pryor Cashman, said that one question the Ghibli-style AI art raises is whether the AI model was trained on Miyazaki or Studio Ghibli's work. That in turn "raises the question of, 'Well, do they have a license or permission to do that training or not?'" he said.

OpenAI didn't respond to a question Thursday about whether it had a license. Weigensberg added that if a work was licensed for training, it might make sense for a company to permit this type of use. But if this type of use is happening without consent and compensation, he said, it could be "problematic."

"'A Howl's Moving Castle' or 'Spirited Away,' you could freeze a frame in any of those films and point to specific things, and then look at the output of generative AI and see identical elements or substantially similar elements in that output," he said. "Just stopping at, Oh, well, style isn't protectable under copyright law.' That's not necessarily the end of the inquiry."

Artist Karla Ortiz, who grew up watching Miyazaki's movies and is suing other AI image generators for copyright infringement in a case that's still pending, called it "another clear example of how companies like OpenAI just do not care about the work of artists and the livelihoods of artists."

"That's using Ghibli's branding, their name, their work, their reputation, to promote (OpenAI) products," Ortiz said. "It's an insult. It's exploitation."

Ortiz was further enraged when President Donald Trump's administration jumped into the meme trend Thursday, using the White House's official X account to post a Ghibli-style image of a weeping woman from the Dominican Republic recently arrested by US immigration agents. The White House and OpenAI didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on how the image was made.

"To see something so brilliant, as wonderful as Miyazaki's work be butchered to generate something so foul," Ortiz wrote on social media, adding that she hoped Studio Ghibli sues "the hell out of" OpenAI for this. *—PTI*

Panic as homes crash in Myanmar and Thailand

Lives hang in the balance; Historical sites turn into dusts

BANGKOK, 28 MARCH

Collapsed bridges and buildings, shaking skyscrapers with water from infinity pools falling hundreds of feet to the ground, and panicked people running out onto the streets are the scenes that followed a massive 7.7 earthquake in central Myanmar that led to tremors in northern Bangkok and southwestern China.

The sound of sirens echoed throughout central Bangkok and vehicles filled the street, leaving some of the city's already congested streets gridlocked. The elevated rapid transit system and subway were shut down. City hall declared the city a disaster area to facilitate interagency aid and emergency help. The greater Bangkok area is home to more than 17 million people, many of whom live in high-rise apartments.

Voranoot Thirawat, a lawyer working in central Bangkok, said her first indication that something was wrong came when she saw a light swinging back and forth. Then she heard the building creaking as it moved back and forth from the shockwaves.

She and her colleagues ran down 12 flights of stairs. "In my lifetime, there was no earthquake like this in Bangkok," she said.

Paul Vincent, a tourist visiting from England, was at a streetside bar when the quake struck said he saw a high-rise building swaying and water falling from a rooftop pool. "When I saw the building, oh my God, that's when ... it hit me," he said. "There was people crying in the streets and, you know, the panic was horrendous really."

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city and close to the epicenter, the earthquake damaged part of the former royal palace and buildings, according to videos and photos released on Facebook social media..

In the Sagaing region just southwest of Mandalay, a 90-year-old bridge collapsed, and some sections of the highway connecting Mandalay and Myanmar's largest city, Yangon, were also damaged. Residents in Yangon rushed out of their homes when the quake struck. There were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths.

In the capital Naypyitaw, the quake damaged religious shrines, sending parts toppling to the ground, and some homes. To the northeast, the earthquake was felt in Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China and caused damage to houses and injuries in the city of Ruili on the border with Myanmar, according to Chinese media reports. Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention said the quake was felt in almost all regions of the country. Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra called an emergency meeting to assess the impact of the quake. —*PTI*

A building is damaged after earthquake in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

A screengrab shows the moment an under-construction building collapses during an earthquake, in Bangkok, Thailand, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel strikes Beirut for 1st time after Nov ceasefire

BEIRUT, 28 MARCH

Israel on Friday launched an attack on the Lebanese capital, Beirut, for the first time since a ceasefire ended the latest Israel-Hezbollah war in November. Associated Press reporters in Beirut saw smoke rising from Beirut's southern suburbs that Israel's military had vowed to strike. The ceasefire took hold between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group, although Israel has struck targets in southern Lebanon almost daily since. After the strike, Israel's army said it attacked a Hezbollah drone storage facility in Dahiyeh, a key Hezbollah stronghold. Israel's defence minister said if there was no peace in Israel's northern communities there would be no peace in Beirut. Hezbollah denied firing the rockets at northern Israel, and blamed Israel. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Lebanon, Syria ease tensions, sign border agreement

BEIRUT, 28 MARCH

Lebanon and Syria have signed an agreement on border demarcation and to boost coordination regarding security along their tense frontier, the Saudi Press Agency reported Friday. The deal signed by the Lebanese and Syrian defense ministers in Saudi Arabia late Thursday came after clashes in border areas this month left many dead and dozens wounded. The plan for border demarcation comes after the ouster in December of the 54-year Assad family rule in Syria, leading to tensions along the frontier where Lebanon's Hezbollah group was active during Syria's 14-year conflict. Hezbollah had been fighting in Syria with Assad during the conflict that killed million. This comes after 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war that weakened the Iran-backed group in Lebanon. —*PTI*

Trump now threatens fund cuts for Smithsonian

WASHINGTON, 28 MARCH

After the JF Kennedy Centre and the Columbia University, it is now the Smithsonian Institution on the line of fire by President Donald Trump who revealed his intention to force changes at Smithsonian Institution with an executive order that targets funding for programmes that advance "divisive narratives" and "improper ideology." The executive order also hints at the return of statues and monuments of Confederate figures, many of which were taken down or replaced around the country after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, which is detested by Trump and other conservatives. —*PTI*

Trans in military: Judge blocks Trump's order

TACOMA, 28 MARCH

A US judge in Washington state has blocked enforcement of President Donald Trump's order banning transgenders from serving in the military, the second nationwide injunction against the policy in as many weeks. The order from US district court judge Benjamin Settle in Tacoma came in a case brought by several long-serving transgender military members who say the ban is discriminatory, and that their firing would cause lasting damage. In his 65-page ruling, Settle, an appointee of former president George W Bush and a former captain in the US Army Judge Advocate General Corps said the administration offered no explanation as to why trans troops, who have been able to serve over the past four years with no evidence of problems, should suddenly be banned. —*PTI*

Putin wants Ukraine under UN-sponsored external governance

MOSCOW, 28 MARCH

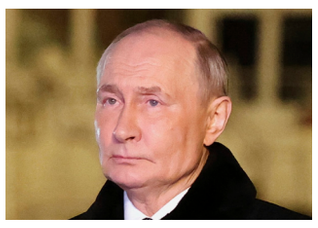
Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday, sought to raise stakes for Ukraine asking for the country to put under UN sponsored external governance while European leaders tried to stitch together plans to deploy troops to cement an peace deal.

Speaking to the crew of a Russian nuclear submarine in televised remarks broadcast, Putin who has been president for 25 years, reaffirmed his claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks legitimacy to sign a peace deal.

"Under the auspices of the United Nations, with the United States, even with European countries, and, of course, with our partners and friends, we could discuss the possibility of introduction of temporary governance in Ukraine," Putin said, adding that it would allow the country to "hold democratic elections, to bring to power a viable government that enjoys the trust of the people, and then begin negotiations with them on a peace treaty".

Putin's remarks came hours after the conclusion of a summit hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron that considered plans to deploy troops to Ukraine to cement an eventual peace deal. France and Britain joined in. "They are playing games and they're playing for time," said UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. "We can't let them drag this out while they continue prosecuting their illegal invasion."

US-brokered agreements this week to safeguard shipping in Black Sea and last week to halt long-range strikes on energy infrastructure were greeted as a first step toward peace. But Ukraine and Russia have accused each other of deal violations. —*PTI*



Russian President Vladimir Putin **PHOTO: PTI**

- Russian President Vladimir Putin claims that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks legitimacy to sign a peace deal

China, Bangladesh sign nine agreements

BEIJING/DHAKA, 28 MARCH

In what could be seen as a message to India, Bangladesh Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus took a chartered plane from Beijing to meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping signing nine agreements to enhance economic and technical development. Yunus' China visit is keenly watched as he is scheduled next week to attend the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok, where he has sought a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India is yet to confirm the meeting.

Highlighting the last year's July-August students' mass protests in Bangladesh leading to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina government, Yunus told Xi that the movement paved a way to build a "New Bangladesh".

Xi, on his part, spoke about the long-standing history of "friendly exchanges" between the two countries and said China maintained a high degree of stability and continuity in ties with Bangladesh and Beijing continues to be a trustworthy neighbour, friend and partner of Dhaka, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Since the Yunus government took over, China has been hosting a number of Bangladesh delegations including Bangladesh's Adviser for Foreign Affairs Touhid Hossain and hardline Islamic parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Analysts here say that Beijing at the same is carefully watching the unfolding chaotic situation in Dhaka and the pressure mounting on 84-year-old Yunus to hold elections without making any major commitments.

Bangladesh and China agreed to strengthen cooperation in such areas as hydrological forecasting, disaster reduction, river dredging, integrated management of water resources, and technology sharing. —*PTI*

Chinese President Xi Jinping with Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Muhammad Yunus **PHOTO: PTI**

IFTAR WITH TRUMP

US President Donald Trump hosts Iftar dinner amidst raging conflict in the Middle East region as he asserted that his administration is keeping its promises to the Muslim community. He also thanked the "hundreds of thousands of Muslim-Americans who supported" him in the 2024 presidential election **PHOTO: PTI**

More journalists detained by Turkey in dawn raids

ISTANBUL, 28 MARCH

The Erdogan Government continued its assault on media with arrests and clampdowns as two journalists were detained in dawn raids in Istanbul early Friday even as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio described events in Turkey as "disturbing.

Elif Bayburt, who works for the Etkin News Agency, and Nisa Suda Demirel, from the Evrensel news website, were the latest to be arrested in sweeps that have hit political activists and trades' unionists as well as journalists.

The protests began last week following the arrest of Istanbul's opposition Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Imamoglu was jailed pending trial on corruption charges many see as politically motivated. The government insists the judiciary is independent and free of political interference. Nearly 1,900 people are arrested since 19 March. Reporters Without Borders and other journalist groups condemned the reporters' arrests. —*PTI*

Nepal pro-monarchy groups clash with cops

KATHMANDU, 28 MARCH

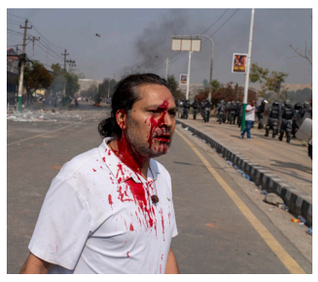
The Army was called out and a curfew was imposed in parts of Kathmandu on Friday after two people was killed and 30 injured as pro-monarchy protesters pelted stones, attacked the office of a political party, set fire to vehicles, and looted shops.

District authorities said the curfew will be in force for about five hours, up to 10 pm. Nobody was to be allowed to move about in certain areas.

In another part of the town, Nepal police on Friday used tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators who torched a house and tried to break security barricades, witnesses said. The police also fired blank rounds in Tinkune area where thousands of monarchists chanted slogans such as "Raja aau desh bachau" (May King come to save the Country), "Down with corrupt government", and "We want monarchy back".

Cops detained youths when demonstrators attempted to move towards New Baneshwor, a restricted area. Pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra Party and others joined.

Nepal's political parties through a Parliament declaration abolished the 240-year-old monarchy in 2008 and turned the erstwhile Hindu kingdom to a secular, federal, democratic republic. The monarchists have been demanding the restoration of the monarchy since the former king appealed for support in his video message on 19 February. —*PTI*



An injured pro-monarchist supporter during a protest in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

AT LEAST 40 SITES

Suspected US strikes hit Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen

DUBAI, 28 MARCH

Suspected US airstrikes pummelled at least 40 sites across Yemen controlled by the Houthi rebels early Friday, including neighbourhoods in the capital, Sanaa, in what appears to be a more extensive operation than under former President Joe Biden. The extent of the damage and possible casualties wasn't immediately clear, though the number of strikes appeared particularly intense compared to other days in the campaign that began March 15.

An Associated Press review found the new American operation under President Donald Trump shifts from solely targeting launch sites under Biden to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities. Initial reports from the Houthis described at least seven being hurt in the attacks in Sanaa, Yemen's capital that the rebels have held since 2014. The new airstrikes, which Houthis say have killed at least 57, started after the rebels threatened to begin targeting "Israeli" ships again over Israel blocking aid entering Gaza.

The US military's Central Command, which now has authority from the White House to strike offensively in Yemen without pre-approval, did not immediately acknowledge conducting any strikes. The command, which under Biden offered details on individual strikes, has not provided that information in this campaign. —*PTI*

Yemen reported at least 45 US military attacks against Houthi targets in many provinces and regions of the country last night **PHOTO: X**

Rubio says 300 'lunatics' stripped of visas

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US has revoked at least 300 foreign students' visas, who he dubbed "lunatics" as part of President Donald Trump's effort to clamp down on pro-Palestinian protesters on university campuses. "If you apply for a student visa to come to the US and you say you're coming not just to study, but to participate in movements that vandalise universities, harass students... we're not giving you that visa."

JD Vance and wife visit Greenland's military base

NUUK, 28 MARCH

Vice President JD Vance and his wife Usha Vance visited Pituffik Space base, an American military base in Greenland on Friday in a trip that was scaled back after an uproar by Greenlanders and Danes who were irked that the original itinerary was planned without consulting them.

Their trip to the semi-autonomous Danish territory comes as relations between the US and the Nordic country have soured after US President Donald Trump suggested that the US should in some form control the mineral-rich territory of Denmark, a traditional US ally and NATO member.

One-day visit to the US Space Force outpost at Pituffik, on the northwest coast of Greenland, has removed the risk of violating potential diplomatic taboos by sending a delegation to another country without an official invitation.

It will reduce the likelihood that Vance and his wife will cross paths with residents angered by Trump's annexation announcements. The base was built following a 1951 defence agreement between Denmark and the United States. It supports missile warning, missile defence and space surveillance operations for the US and NATO. It was known as the Thule Air Base until 2023, when it was renamed to recognise Greenlandic cultural heritage and reflect its role in the new US Space Force. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold prices soar to record high of Rs 92,150 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Gold prices have surged by Rs 1,100 to reach a record high of Rs 92,150 per 10g in the national capital. Gold's value has increased by Rs 23,730 or 35 per cet since 1 April last year. The rise in gold prices is being driven by fears of an escalating global trade war and its implications for economic development. Spot gold surged to a record high of USD 3,086.08 per ounce, while Comex gold futures hit a peak of USD 3,124.40 per ounce. Silver prices also rose sharply, increasing by Rs 1,300 to trade near a record high of Rs 1,03,000 per kg. —*PTI*

Rupee rises 25 paise to close at 85.49 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

The rupee appreciated 25 paise to close at 85.49 (provisional) against the USD on Friday, logging the best monthly gain in over six years, supported by a resurgence of foreign fund inflows. In the current financial year the rupee has depreciated more than 2 per cent. On 2 April, 2024 it was quoted at 83.42 against the US dollar. Forex dealers said the domestic unit has witnessed significant appreciation supported by robust foreign fund inflows into the capital market. Foreign investors have infused over Rs 32,000 crore in the past six consecutive trading sessions. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.09 per cent higher at 104.43. —*PTI*

RBI asks banks to conduct special clearing

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

The RBI on Friday asked all banks to mandatorily participate in the special clearing operations on 31 March to facilitate accounting of all government transactions for 2024–25. The Income Tax and CGST offices across the country will remain open on 29 March to 31 March despite the weekend and Eid-al-Fitr, which may fall on Monday. Earlier, the RBI had said all government transactions done by agency banks for 2024–25 must be accounted for within the same financial year. In a circular on Friday, the RBI also asked all agency banks to keep all branches dealing with government receipts and payments open for over-the-counter transactions related to government transactions up to the normal working hours on 31 March, 2025.—*PTI*

Decthalon revenue crosses Rs 4K cr mark in FY24

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Decathlon India has achieved a significant milestone, generating over RS.4,000 crore in revenue and becoming profitable in FY24 with gains of Rs 197.19 crore. The company's revenue from operations increased by 2.24 per cent to Rs 4,008.26 crore. Decathlon Sports India's total income reached Rs 4,066.40 crore, the highest in the last five years. Sales from stores contributed Rs 3,430.67 crore, while B2B sales added Rs 117.68 crore. However, e-commerce sales declined by 2.2 per cent to Rs 437.07 crore. The company's spending on advertising promotions increased by 33 per cent to Rs 87.49 crore in FY24. Decathlon Sports India, has expressed its commitment to the Indian market. The company has invested 100 million euros so far and plans to invest an additional 100 million euros over the next five years. Decathlon India aims to become one of the company's top five global markets within five years. —*PTI*

Markets fall as tariffs sink global equities

Nifty dropped 272,60 points or 0.31 per cent while Sensexfell 191.51 points or 0.25 per cent

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

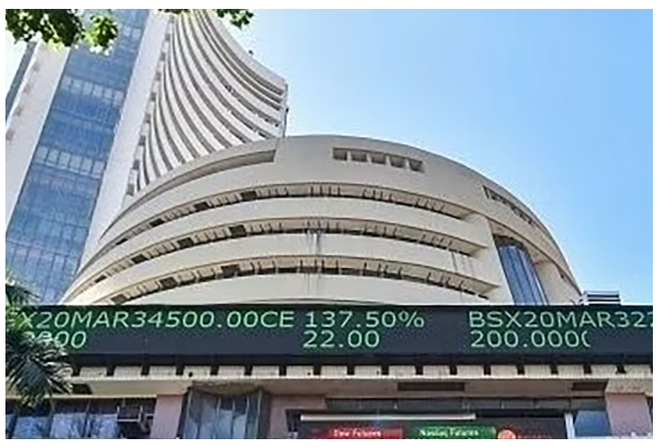
Stock markets closed on a bearish note on the last trading session of the 2024-25 fiscal on Friday, with benchmark Sensex falling by 191 points following weak global trends amid uncertainties over Trump tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 191.51 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 77,414.92 in a volatile trading session. During the day, it slumped 420.81 points or 0.54 per cent to 77,185.62.

The NSE Nifty dropped 72.60 points or 0.31 per cent to 23,519.35.

In the 2024-25 financial year, the Sensex jumped 3,763.57 points or 5.10 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 1,192.45 points or 5.34 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, IndusInd Bank dropped over 3.50 per cent, followed by Mahindra & Mahindra, which declined more than 2 per cent. HCL Tech, Maruti, Infosys, Zomato, Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.



IndusInd and Mahindra were among the major laggards PHOTO: PTI

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Nestle and Bharti Airtel were among the gainers.

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with deep cuts. European markets were quoting in the negative territory. US markets ended lower on Thursday.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.68 per cent and the smallcap index dipped 0.35 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT dropped the most by 1.87 per cent, followed by IT (1.77 per cent), realty (1.44 per cent), teck (1.39 per cent), utilities (1.08 per cent) and auto (1.07 per cent).

Bankex and oil & gas were the gainers.

- In the 2024-25 financial year, the Sensex jumped 3,763.57 points or 5.10 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 1,192.45 points or 5.34 per cent.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark gauge climbed 509.41 points or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 168.95 points or 0.72 per cent.

As many as 2,499 stocks declined while 1,497 advanced and 123 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Stock markets would remain closed on Monday for Eid-Ul-Fitr. Foreign Institutional Investors bought equities worth Rs 11,111.25 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.18 per cent to USD 74.16 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark gauge climbed 317.93 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,606.43 on Thursday. The Nifty rallied 105.10 points or 0.45 per cent to 23,591.95. —*PTI*

Hyundai Motor debuts in Nifty market

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) has announced its integration into key market indices, including Nifty Next 50, Nifty 100, and Nifty 500, following its listing on the Indian stock markets on 22 October 2024.

HMIL Managing Director Unsoo Kim expressed excitement over this significant milestone, stating, "By becoming part of prestigious Indian capital market indices such as Nifty Next 50 and BSE 500, we have reinforced HMIL's position in the Indian stock exchanges, enhancing our market presence and credibility."

As India continues to develop, Kim emphasised that HMIL will grow alongside it with an unwavering focus on innovation, operational efficiency, and strategic investments that will bolster its business outlook and contribute to the nation's economic development. The National Stock Exchange of India Ltd (NSE) has included HMIL in its esteemed Nifty Next 50 index, along with various broad market and thematic indices.

Notably, in a recent update to the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) index on 28 February 2025, HMIL became the only large cap from India added to the MSCI Global Standard Index. Additionally, it was included in several BSE indices, including BSE 500, BSE All Cap, and BSE Large Cap from 24 March. In 2024, HMIL achieved a record domestic sales figure of 605,433 vehicles, marking its third consecutive year of success. —*PTI*

US tariffs to cost India 0.1% of GDP: CareEdge Report

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

India's direct export loss due to tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump is expected to remain limited at only 0.1 per cent of the country's GDP, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings.

However, the report added that the broader impact of global trade tensions may have more significant consequences through indirect channels such as weaker exports, lower investment and consumption sentiment and pressure on capital flows and the currency.

"India's direct export loss due to such tariffs could be limited to around 0.1 per cent of GDP," the report said.

It, however, highlighted that some trade disruptions may happen because of the reciprocal tariffs from the US.

But the overall direct impact on India's GDP is expected to be minimal. The real concern, however, is the possibility of a larger global trade war, which could create uncertainty in international markets and affect India's economy through multiple channels.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

One of the key risks identified is the potential volatility in foreign portfolio investment (FPI) flows. With growing global uncertainties, FPI flows into India are likely to fluctuate, which may put additional pressure on the Indian rupee.

The report projects that the Indian rupee to trade with a depreciation bias and expects the USD/INR exchange rate to be around 88–89 by the end of the financial year 2025–26.

The report anticipated that the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee could reduce the policy interest rate by 25–50 basis points in FY26 based on moderating inflation and the need to support economic growth. —*ANI*

Govt starts Rs 23K cr scheme for electronics

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved a production-linked incentive scheme for passive or non-semiconductor electronics components with an outlay of Rs 22,919 crore, Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

It is the first scheme that focuses on promoting the manufacturing of passive electronic components. The Minister said that the scheme will create direct employment for 91,600 people and attract investment of around Rs 59,350 crore.

He said that the segment will serve the requirements of several sectors, including telecom, consumer electronics, automobile, medical devices, power sector etc

He said that the scheme is expected to lead to production of Rs 4.56 lakh crore.

According to electronics component makers body Electronic Industries Association of India (Elcina), non-semiconductor components production in India was around USD 13 billion in 2022 which is projected to reach around USD 20.7 billion by 2026 and around USD 37 billion by 2030 if the business continues as usual thereby leading a deficit of USD 248 billion in the segment in the next six years.

Elcina had sought about Rs 72,500 crore support package to reduce the deficit by Rs 12.36 lakh crore in the next six years. —*PTI*

Govt imposes 10% import duty on desi chana

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Indian government has announced a 10 per cent import duty on desi chana (Bengal gram), effective from 1 April. This decision reverses a previous policy that permitted duty-free imports to boost domestic supply and stabilise prices, which was set to continue until 31 March 2025. According to a finance ministry notification issued on 27 March, the new duty will apply to all imports of Bengal gram. Current government estimates suggest that chana production will rise to 11.5 million tonnes in 2024-25, up from 11 million tonnes in the previous year, reflecting an increase in domestic agricultural output. —*PTI*

Blackstone-backed ASK to enter market, says Sebi

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Blackstone-backed ASK Asset & Wealth Management Group on Friday said it has received an in-principle approval from the markets regulator Sebi to start its mutual fund business. This development marks a significant step in ASK's expansion plans.

The mutual fund offering will complement ASK's existing suite of investment solutions, which cover listed equity portfolio management, and wealth management, providing a broader range of opportunities for investors across segments.

"We have received in-principle approval for entering the mutual fund business. India's investment landscape is evolving rapidly, and we see a tremendous opportunity to bring our research-driven, client-centric investment approach to a wider audience.

"We are confident that with ASK's deep-rooted expertise and commitment to long-term wealth creation, and with our legacy of trust and performance, we will be able to offer differentiated products that cater to the diverse needs of investors," Sunil Rohokale, Co-Founder, CEO and Managing Director, ASK Asset & Wealth Management Group, said in a statement.

The company said it will now work towards fulfilling Sebi's requirements to obtain the final approval and launch its mutual fund offerings.

The Mutual Fund Industry has seen a significant growth with assets under management (AUM) growing three times from Rs 24 lakh crore in March 2019 to Rs 67 lakh crore as of January 2025. Further, unique investors also saw a rise from 1.9 crore to 5.3 crore during the same period. —*PTI*

Infra sectors' growth slips to 5-month low

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The output of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to a five-month low of 2.9 per cent in February, as against 7.1 per cent growth registered a year ago, according to official data released on Friday.

On a monthly basis, the production growth of the core sectors was lower than the 5.1 per cent expansion recorded in January. The previous low level of growth at 2.4 per cent was recorded in September 2024. In February, production of crude oil and natural gas recorded a negative growth.

The production growth of coal, refinery products, steel and electricity moderated to 1.7 per cent, 0.8 per cent, 5.6 per cent, and 2.8 per cent, respectively, against 11.6 per cent, 2.6 per cent, 9.4 per cent and 7.6 per cent in February last year. —*PTI*

Others in fray with Starlink for satcom services: Telecom Minister

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Not only Elon Musk's Startlink but several other players have applied to start their satellite communication services in India, Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday.

The minister said that satellite services will be complementary to the existing communication network and help in covering remote areas.

"We have already given out two licences, one to Reliance and the other to Bharti Airtel. For satellites, we have a number of companies that are in the pipeline that have applied," Scindia said at Times Now Summit 2025.

Jyotiraditya Scindia PHOTO: ANI

The minister said that satellite companies need to meet the requirements to begin their operations in the country. He added that there are four telecom service providers in the country and that will continue to be the case.

He claimed state-run BSNL is ahead of the curve after 18 years. In the October-December quarter, the company posted a Rs 262 crore net profit. —*ANI*

Med tourism to generate USD 13B by '26

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

India's medical tourism industry is set to witness strong growth, with its market size projected to reach USD 13.42 billion by 2026, according to a report by Grant Thornton.

One of the major reasons behind India's emergence as a global healthcare hub is its affordability. The country offers medical treatments at just 20-25 per cent of the cost in developed nations.

This cost-effectiveness, combined with high-quality healthcare services, attracts patients from across the world, strengthening India's position in the global medical tourism market.

India's healthcare industry is also experiencing a rapid shift towards digital solutions. AI-powered diagnostics, telemedicine, and other health-tech innovations are transforming patient care. The AI-driven healthcare market is expected to grow from USD 14.6 billion in 2023 to USD 102.7 billion by 2028, .

The expansion of health insurance coverage is further boosting the sector. In FY23, gross direct premium income underwritten by health insurance companies grew to Rs 90,600 crores.

With cost advantages, infrastructure expansion, mergers, and growing investment, India's medical tourism sector is on a strong growth path, the report claimed. —*ANI*

PRIVACY OR FUNCTIONALITY?

Do you talk to Alexa? Amazon is listening

SYDNEY, MAR 28

Amazon has disabled two key privacy features in its Alexa smart speakers, in a push to introduce artificial intelligence-powered "agentic capabilities" and turn a profit from the popular devices.

Starting on 28 March, Alexa devices will send all audio recordings to the cloud for processing, and choosing not to save these recordings will disable personalisation features.

A voice assistant works by constantly listening for a "wake word", such as "Alexa". Once woken, it records the command that is spoken and matches it to an action, such as playing a music track. Matching a spoken command to an action requires what computer scientists call natural language understanding, which can take a lot of computer power.

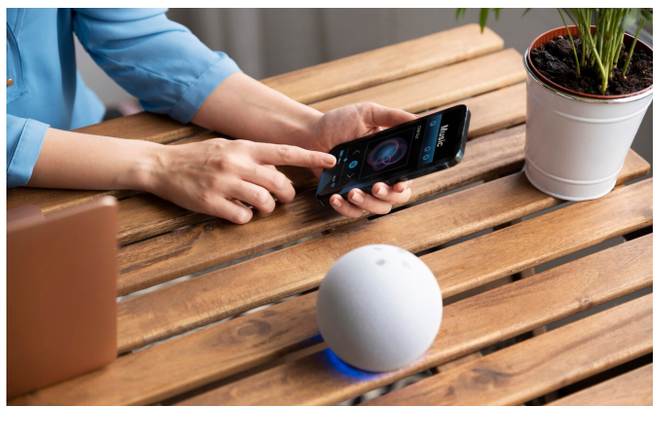


PHOTO:FREEPIK

Matching commands to actions can be done on the device itself, or sound recordings can be uploaded to the cloud for processing.

Alexa devices send recordings to the cloud by default. However, some high-end Echo models previously supported a setting called "Do not send voice recordings". If this setting was enabled, all recordings were processed locally. In practice, only a tiny fraction of Echo users around 0.03 per cent had this turned on.

In the first change, this setting is being disabled, and all recordings will be sent to the cloud. Once in the cloud, recordings can be deleted or saved.

Saved recordings are used for Amazon's Voice ID feature, which distinguishes between speakers in the same household and aims to provide a personalised experience.

Alexa users also have a setting called "Don't save recordings", which, if enabled, deletes cloud recordings once they're processed. In the second change, if the "Don't save recordings" setting is enabled, Voice ID will stop working, and with it, access to personalised features. The change means users need to make a trade-off between privacy and functionality. —*PTI*

Stock holding rules get stricter for sugar mills

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Indian government has announced plans to take stringent action against sugar mills that violate monthly stock holding limits. The Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry sets monthly limits to prevent hoarding and control price increases. For April, the limit is set at 23.5 lakh tonnes.

Despite previous warnings, some sugar mills have repeatedly breached these limits, prompting the ministry to issue new guidelines. Penalties for non-compliance will be severe, including deductions from future release quotas.

For first-time offenders, 100% of excess sugar sold will be deducted from the next month's quota. Subsequent violations will incur progressively higher deductions, ranging from 115% for the second offence to 150% for the fourth. Mills that fail to meet their quota without notifying the authorities will face restricted future allocations.

PHOTO:ANI

The ministry aims to ensure a consistent supply of sugar and maintain price stability through these measures. The new guidelines will come into effect on 1 April, 2025. Sugar mills that violate the stock holding limits more than twice in a sugar season will be disqualified from additional releases and government scheme benefits. —*PTI*

BCCI set to get a new spin bowling coach

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The BCCI's Centre of Excellence (COE) will soon have a new spin bowling coach, replacing Sairaj Bahutule, who resigned earlier this year to join the IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals. The COE, which has shifted to its new location in Bengaluru, was earlier known as National Cricket Academy (NCA). Since Bahutule left, the post lay vacant and now the board has invited applications for a role which will be "integral to the development and performance enhancement of India's spin bowling talent across all formats and age groups including India Senior Teams (Men & Women), India A, U-23, U-19, U-16, and U-15 squads and State association players training at the BCCI COE."—*PTI*

NBA, FIBA take next steps to explore Euro league

NEW YORK, 28 MARCH

The NBA may soon be significantly expanding its presence in European basketball, in the form of partnering with FIBA on a new league that the sides have been talking about for many years. Specifics are few, with the initial target, for now, being that it would be a 16-team league. But the announcement made Thursday by NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and FIBA secretary general Andreas Zagklis is a major step forward after a long process of the sides going back and forth with ideas about what might work. "We feel now is the time to move to that next stage," Silver said, noting that NBA owners offered "enthusiastic support" for such a move.—*PTI*

Chennai Esports Global C'ship to be held later this year

CHENNAI, 28 MARCH

Tamil Nadu state government on Friday announced the multi-title Chennai Esports Global Championship (CeGC) to be held here later this year, featuring teams from around the world. The initiative will be led by the Youth Welfare and Sports Development Department of Tamil Nadu, which has been allocated Rs 562 crore in the state's 2025-2026 budget. "This initiative marks one of the most significant investments by an Indian state government toward esports, reinforcing Tamil Nadu's commitment to fostering the industry and elevating it to global standards," a release said. "A portion of this budget will be utilised to bring the CeGC to life, positioning Chennai as a premier destination for esports not just in India but globally, capable of hosting world-class competitions."—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Spanish court overturns Dani's rape conviction

BARCELONA, 28 MARCH

Dani Alves won his appeal against a sexual assault conviction as a Spanish court overturned the ruling Friday. Alves was found guilty in February 2024 of raping a woman in a nightclub in December 2022 and sentenced to four years, six months in prison. He denied wrongdoing during the three-day trial. The former Brazil and Barcelona star was released from prison in March 2024 while waiting for his appeal to be heard by a higher court.That court ruled Friday that there was "insufficient evidence" to rule out Alves' presumption of innocence. —*PTI*

Pandya returns to lead MI, Siraj's form concerns Titans

At Motera, the ball won't grip as much as it did at Chepauk

AHMEDABAD, 28 MARCH

Mumbai Indians VS Gujarat Titans

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	5
GT Won:	3
MUMBAI Won:	2

MI vs GT Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

Skipper Hardik Pandya's much-anticipated comeback after serving a one-match ban will lend the required balance to Mumbai Indians' line-up when they take on an equally desperate Gujarat Titans here on Saturday, as both teams are chasing their first victory in the ongoing edition of the IPL.

Mumbai could not break their long-standing jinx of losing their IPL opener as Chennai Super Kings comfortably won by four wickets, while Gujarat Titans lost a high-scoring game to Punjab Kings by 11 runs. With nearly a week's gap between the first and second games, the MI team spent a few days at Reliance's Jamnagar facility, where the whole unit relaxed and engaged in team-bonding activities. It is still early days in the tournament, and MI's struggle without their pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was apparent. Missing regular skipper Pandya in the opening game only made the matter worse. In Indian cricket, Pandya is the only pure.

It will also be a test for rookie left-arm wrist spinner Vignesh Puthur, who got three CSK wickets on a helpful track. At Motera, the ball won't grip as much as it did at Chepauk, and the turn will also be minimal. How the youngster is managed by his skipper is a big question.

But on Saturday evening in Ahmedabad, the conditions for batting will be much better after 475 runs cumulatively were scored in the opening match between Punjab Kings (243) and Titans (232).

And on a track which is a batting paradise, a serious question mark remains on Mohammed Siraj's effectiveness. But it is the bowling that will give Gill nightmares as most Indian bowlers, Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, and veteran Ishant Sharma, are one-dimensional hit-the-deck bowlers. No pacer except Rabada has subtle variations in his armoury. —*PTI*

Hardik Pandya

Mohammed Siraj

Dhawan's life lessons have transformed me: Sharma

Ashutosh Sharma will forever remain indebted to his former franchise Punjab Kings' skipper Shikhar Dhawan, whose "life lessons" will stay with him forever.The 26-year-old played a sensational unbeaten innings of 66 off 31 balls, smashing five fours and five sixes to steer Delhi Capitals in a thrilling chase of 210 against Lucknow Super Giants despite being 65/5 at one stage.After the victory, Ashutosh dedicated his Player-of-the-Match award to Dhawan, acknowledging the impact the veteran left-hander has had on his career.

Ashutosh, who has been picked by DC for INR 3.8 crore at the mega auction.—*PTI*

Fans' obsession with Dhoni is strange, does not serve the game well

-Ambati Rayudu, Former India batter

fascinating to watch Nicholas Pooran send the ball soaring into the stands

-Mitchell Marsh, Australian T20I captain

Vignesh is to keep his feet on the ground and start from ball one again

-Mahela Jayawardene, Mumbai Indians head coach

MIAMI OPEN TITLE

Djokovic beats Korda, advances to semifinals

MIAMI GARDENS, 28 MARCH

Novak Djokovic is finding a higher gear in South Florida after a sluggish start to 2025.

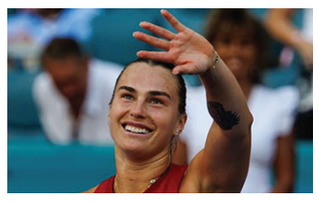
Djokovic, gunning for his seventh Miami Open title, dispatched American Sebastian Korda 6-3, 7-6 (7-4) Thursday in one hour, 24 minutes in a quarterfinal match that was postponed from Wednesday night because the women's quarterfinal between Jessica Pegula and Emma Raducanu ran past 11 p.m. and would have begun at about midnight against new ATP rules.

Djokovic advanced to Friday's semifinals and will face Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov. Djokovic is 12-1 against the 33-year-old Dimitrov, who reached the tournament finals in 2024.

Djokovic, who won all six of his titles at the tournament's previous venue at Key Biscayne, is going for his 100th professional title.

He served an ace on match point and finished with an 83 percent first-service percentage against the 24th-seeded Korda. The 37-year-old Serbian let out a yell after the victory and strummed his racket like a violin. "One word serve? Djokovic said when asked what the key to his second-set surge was. "I was serving very well best serving performance in a long time." The men's leader in Grand Slam titles at 24 has been out of form this year, starting with an injury retirement at the Australian Open in January. Earlier this month, Djokovic lost his first match at Indian Wells to Botic van de Zandschulp.

Novak Djokovic PHOTO: X



Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: X

Sabalenka to face Pegula

World number one Aryna Sabalenka will face Jessica Pegula in the Miami Open final on Saturday after teenage sensation Alexandra Eala was beaten in the semi-finals. Belarusian Sabalenka, 26, is yet to drop a set at the tournament and was in fine form as she stormed to a 6-2, 6-2 win over sixth seed Jasmine Paolini. Sabalenka, a three-time Grand Slam champion, has now reached two finals in succession, having lost to Mirra Andreeva at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Top seed Sabalenka - who has never previously reached the Miami showpiece - delivered a clinical performance on Thursday, dominating Italian Paolini with powerful serves and punishing groundstrokes. —*PTI*

FIDE Women's Grand Prix 5th leg to be held in Pune

PUNE, 28 MARCH

A host of top Indian chess players, including current world rapid champion Grandmaster Koneru Humpy, Olympiad gold winners GM Harika Dronavalli, GM Vaishali Rameshbabu and Divya Deshmukh will compete in the fifth leg of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix from 13-24 April here.

The tournament will be organised by the Maharashtra Chess Association and will also feature China's GM Zhu Jiner, Russia's Polina Shuvalova, Alina Kashlinskaya of Poland, Salimova Nurgyul of Bulgaria, Batkhuyag of Mongolia, and Melia Salome of Georgia. The FIDE Grand Prix series will feature 14 top players who have been selected on their performances in the earlier rounds of the series. —*PTI*

Gurindervir smashes men's 100m national record

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Gurindervir Singh stormed into the record books, smashing the men's 100m national record with a blistering 10.20-second run in a top-class field at the Indian Grand Prix 1, here on Friday. The 24-year-old Punjab sprinter, representing Reliance, eclipsed the previous national mark of 10.23 seconds set by Manikanta Hoblidhar in October 2023.Singh's previous personal best stood at 10.27 seconds -- clocked in 2021.

"I'm extremely happy to have posted a good time in the IGP ahead of the Federation Cup in April," Singh said after the race. "I wanted to run a fast race, but the national record was a bonus. I should be able to do better at the Federation Cup (April 21-24 in Kochi)," he added. He said his main goal this season is to do his best at the Asian Athletics Championships to be held in Gumi, South Korea, in May. Hoblidhar, also of Reliance, finished a close second with a time of 10.22 seconds, which also bettered his own earlier national record by 0.01 seconds in the men's 100m Final Race D. —*PTI*

KSLTA stadium renamed after SM Krishna

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

In a befitting tribute to the late SM Krishna, former Chief Minister of Karnataka and long-serving President of the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA), the state apex body today renamed the KSLTA stadium, housed in the picturesque heart of the city Cubbon Park, as SM Krishna Tennis Stadium. Making the occasion momentous, scholarships worth Rs 12 lakhs were awarded to 10 young and upcoming tennis players from Karnataka.

Krishna who was an avid tennis enthusiast, spearheaded KSLTA as its president between 1999 to 2019. —*PTI*

BCCI CENTRAL CONTRACTS

No demotion for Rohit, Virat

NEW DELHI, 30 OCT

The BCCI is likely to announce its central contract list in the next few days. According to reports, the BCCI is set to convene a meeting on Saturday with BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia and India head coach Gautam Gambhir in attendance.

There will be a lot of intrigue surrounding big names like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Ravindra Jadeja. The veteran trio now play only two formats after having retired from T20s following the 2024 T20 World Cup win.

If a TOI report is to be believed, India's ODI and Test captain Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and allrounder Ravindra Jadeja will continue to be placed in the A+ category of central contracts - the highest level among central contracts.

The trio, along with Jasprit Bumrah, will be retained in the category, according to sources, said the report.

The report further claimed Shreyas Iyer, who was dropped from the BCCI central contracts for the 2023-24 season for not playing domestic cricket, is set to be back.

Wicketkeeper Ishan Kishan was also dropped along with Iyer, but there remains doubt over his inclusion. —*PTI*

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli

PHOTO: PTI

Barcelona beats Osasuna 3-0 to extend La Liga lead

BARCELONA, 28 MARCH

Ferran Torres and Dani Olmo scored early goals to lead Barcelona to a 3-0 win over Osasuna and extend its lead in the Spanish league. Coach Hansi Flick rested Robert Lewandowski until the final stretch, when the Poland star came on and headed in a cross by fellow substitute Fermin López. It was Lewandowski's league-leading 23rd goal of the season.

The game had been originally scheduled for March 8 but was postponed after a first-team doctor of Barcelona died hours before kickoff. The victory moved Barcelona three points ahead of Real Madrid and seven points ahead of Atletico Madrid with 10 rounds remaining. Frenkie de Jong played Balde clear before the left back found Torres for the striker's 14th goal of the season across all competitions, despite playing most games as a second-half substitute for Lewandowski. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X / @FCBARCELONA

SEMI-FINAL BERTH

Chhetri-powered B'luru host MC in knockout match

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Former Cup winners Bengaluru FC, powered by the evergreen Sunil Chhetri, would look to secure a place in the Indian Super League semi-finals when they host Mumbai City FC in a high-stakes knockout clash here on Saturday.

The veteran forward Chhetri, who recently came out of International retirement, has already converted four penalties this season and could become the first player to score 10 goals against Mumbai City FC in ISL history.

Chhetri has scored eight goals in ISL playoffs, more than any other player in the competition's history, as he would once again look to make a difference. With goals in three of his last four playoff appearances, the Indian legend remains a major threat to the Islanders' backline.

Bengaluru finished third in the league standings with 38 points from 24 matches, courtesy of 11 wins and five draws. Mumbai City FC, on the other hand, managed to scrape into the playoffs with a sixth-place finish after a decisive 2-0 victory over the Blues on the final matchday. The top two teams Mohun Bagan Super Giant and FC Goa this season -- at the end of the League stage will automatically qualify for the semi-finals. Teams finishing between third and sixth will feature in a single-leg knockout to determine the other two semi-finalists.

NorthEast United and Jamshedpur FC finished fourth and fifth in the league stage and they face against each other on Sunday in Shillong to seal the last remaining semifinal spot.

Historically, Mumbai City FC has dominated this fixture in recent times, winning four of their last five matches against Bengaluru.

However, the hosts will take confidence from their dramatic penalty shootout victory over the Islanders in the 2022-23 semi-finals.—*PTI*

Ronaldo to lead CONMEBOL anti-racism task force

BUENOS AIRES, 28 MARCH

Brazil's two-time World Cup winner Ronaldo Nazario will lead a special task force created to try to eradicate racism, discrimination, and violence in South American soccer, the sport's continental governing body said Thursday.

"Its mission will be to design policies and establish prevention and sanction mechanisms that contribute to eradicating these behaviors that affect both sport and society," CONMEBOL said in a statement. The 48-year-old Ronaldo retired in 2019 after a career that included World Cup titles in 1994 and 2002. The appointment followed a meeting of leaders, government officials, former players, and player union representatives convened by CONMEBOL President Alejandro Domínguez to address the issues following his controversial statements about Brazilian football.

Domínguez created a furor when he said Brazilian clubs withdrawing from the Copa Libertadores because of episodes of racism would make the competition "like Tarzan without Cheetah." —*PTI*